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THE FOURTH PARTY



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THE FOURTH PARTY

THE FOURTH PARTY

BY

HAROLD E. GORST

WITH A PREFACE BY SIR JOHN GORST, M.P.

WITH FRONTISPIECE AND FACSIMILE LETTER

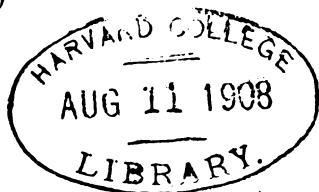
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PREFACE

I HAVE always scrupulously abstained from any public expression of opinion on the political events in the Tory party, in which I was personally concerned, which followed upon the death of Lord Beaconsfield. They resulted in the gradual extinction of the authority and influence of Sir Stafford Northcote, and culminated in the installation of the Marquess of Salisbury as Prime Minister and head of the Tory party, and in the brief apotheosis of Lord Randolph Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House of Commons. From that epoch Tory democracy, which was the ideal on which Mr. Disraeli's domestic policy was based, has been by the party leaders

discredited and abandoned. The few members of the party who still cling to the principles of Mr. Disraeli are suspected of being Radicals or Socialists.

I have no intention of breaking silence upon the present occasion, but I cannot be indifferent to the desire, however impossible to realise, that these events should be correctly recorded, so that the impartial historian of the future may be in a position to form a correct judgment upon them. I have, therefore, placed all my recollection of the past, and such documents as I possess, at the disposal of the author of this book. I have taken all the pains I can to make my testimony truthful and accurate. But the author is alone responsible for the use he has made of it, the conclusions of fact he has drawn from it, and the opinions formed thereupon; for, indeed, neither oral testimony given long after the events, nor even contemporary documents, are such infallible guides as historians are accustomed to assume.

Oral testimony, even when given by careful, competent, and candid witnesses, is liable to err.

Anybody who has been accustomed to attend courts of justice knows that this is so, even when evidence is given while the facts are still fresh. So much depends on the point of view from which the events have been regarded. But after the lapse of time memory plays strange tricks. Many of the surrounding circumstances have faded away altogether, and are completely obliterated from the mind. The recollection that still remains is coloured and often distorted by subsequent events and more recent experiences. Things are looked at through a different medium: the view may be mellowed by wisdom and justice; it may be soured by hatred and envy. But faith in the old judgment is shaken, while it is too late to form a new one.

Documents scarcely deserve the implicit reliance which is placed upon them. It is true that the words actually written down at the time may be faithfully preserved. But the motive with which they were written, the effect which they were designed to produce upon the person to whom the document was addressed, the facts and considerations omitted, because necessarily

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present to the mind of the recipient—all these things and many more, essential to the true interpretation of the writing, may be unknown or forgotten. Written as well as spoken words are sometimes used to conceal thoughts. From all this it results that history, however carefully compiled, must inevitably reflect to a very considerable extent the imagination of the historian, and that the real truth about events, even recent, even contemporaneous, cannot always be discovered.

JOHN E. GORST.

CARLTON CLUB: *December 26, 1905.*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

My endeavour throughout the following pages has been to do justice to the motives by which the actions of the four persons chiefly concerned were individually inspired. Above all things, it has been my constant aim to write down events with historical accuracy, and to comment upon them with as little bias as it is possible for an author to bring to his task. Having had largely to depend upon the recollections of the two surviving members of the Fourth Party who were consistently in its counsels from beginning to end, I have been careful to correct the impressions of the one by those of the other, and to strive by this means to arrive at the truth. The attempt has been rendered the less difficult from the circumstance that, although the

opinions formed by these witnesses in regard to certain events may not have always coincided, I have in no instance encountered any material divergence as to the actual facts.

I wish to acknowledge my great indebtedness to Mr. Winston Churchill and his publishers, Messrs. Macmillan & Company, for their kindness in placing at my disposal the proofs of the first volume of 'Lord Randolph Churchill,' with its wealth of documentary evidence regarding the Fourth Party days. Upon this material I have drawn to the extent that seemed essential in presenting the fullest history of the little group of Conservative independents compatible with the limits of this volume. If I have been occasionally led to criticise Mr. Churchill's statements or conclusions, it has been solely with the object of assisting to elucidate the truth. I am equally grateful to Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, who not only placed at my disposal the whole of his private correspondence with the other members of the Fourth Party, but who has rendered the most valuable assistance in

reading and revising the proofs of this book. But it is due to Sir Henry Wolff to state that the inferences I have drawn in regard to the final incident in the career of the Fourth Party do not altogether coincide with his own view, nor does he regard the reconciliation with Lord Salisbury in any sense as a 'surrender.'¹

It will be understood that, with four such colleagues on terms of personal intimacy, most of the letters contain—or consist entirely of—frankly expressed allusions to contemporary politicians that could not be published without offence. Some of the letters selected for reproduction in this volume have also been utilised by Mr. Winston Churchill; others appear here for the first time. But the correspondence in its entirety has been of the greatest historical value to the writer, and much of its contents is naturally reflected in the pages that follow.

The original material on which this more comprehensive account of the Fourth Party has been founded was contributed by me

¹ See Appendix.

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to the 'Nineteenth Century Review,' in the form of articles, from November, 1902, to January, 1903. My acknowledgments are therefore due to Sir James Knowles on that account. I am also indebted to 'Hansard's Debates' for some of the Parliamentary speeches and episodes, which have been rendered here in fuller detail.

In conclusion, I should like to express the hope that, in my endeavour to write the truth, I may have avoided giving offence to anybody—in an especial degree to Mr. Winston Churchill, whose impartiality and breadth of mind in touching upon many delicate points inseparable from a review of events in which Lord Randolph Churchill took so conspicuous a part cannot fail to inspire respect and admiration.

HAROLD E. GORST.

LONDON : *December 26, 1905.*

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THE FOURTH PARTY	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>(Reproduced by kind permission of the proprietors of 'Vanity Fair')</i>	
FACSIMILE LETTER FROM THE LATE LORD SALISBURY TO SIR HENRY DRUMMOND WOLFF	<i>To face p. 310</i>

THE FOURTH PARTY

CHAPTER I

THE OPPORTUNITY

THE brilliant and meteoric career of the Fourth Party is practically unparalleled in politics. It is a circumstance peculiarly characteristic of our political life that even the strongest and most gifted individuals fail to climb to the top of the ladder single-handed. In Parliament it is the combination which succeeds: the forces at work are too powerful to be overcome by unaided effort. Disraeli was a striking example of the truth of this assertion. He struggled heroically for session after session against obstacles that might have daunted anybody with less assertiveness and self-confidence. He struggled almost alone, without powerful friends or family influence to help him on. But he also struggled in vain. Peel refused to recognise his abilities:

he had nothing to fear from an unsupported individual. It was when Disraeli, after the mortification of admitting this fact, adroitly threw in his lot with Lord George Bentinck, and by subtle means captured the flower of the Conservative party, that he succeeded in achieving the object of his ambition, crushed Peel for ever, and won his way to the proudest position in the State. As long as the members of the Fourth Party stood shoulder to shoulder they remained a force in the House of Commons, and were on the road to win the confidence of the country. The loosening of the tie at the critical moment of supreme victory brought about the ultimate catastrophe.

In order to understand how the Fourth Party came into being, it is necessary to consider the situation of affairs at the time of the meeting of Parliament after the Easter dissolution in 1880. Three years previously Disraeli had retired to the House of Lords, leaving the leadership of the Commons in the hands of Sir Stafford Northcote. Disraeli did this, as he afterwards admitted to Sir Henry Drummond Wolff,¹ in the firm conviction that Gladstone had permanently retired from the leadership

¹ See pp. 151-2.

and intended to give up his seat in the House of Commons. The selection of Sir Stafford Northcote as leader in his place was based upon the assumption that Lord Hartington would lead the Liberal party in the Lower Chamber. This proved to be an unhappy miscalculation. Disraeli would not have dreamt of leaving the House of Commons had he not positively believed that Gladstone had seriously given up politics. But there was a double surprise in store for him at the dissolution in 1880. In the first place, the Conservatives were hopelessly beaten at the polls. The new party organisation that had secured their triumph in 1874 had been imitated and improved upon by the Liberals. In vain were the Conservative leaders warned by those who knew what was going on in the hostile camp. Lord Beaconsfield, who had had the practical foresight to re-organise after the disastrous result of his first appeal to the new constituencies, was far too preoccupied with Imperial dreams to trouble further about the party machinery. Most of his principal supporters—the Cabinet of marquises, as they were called—were content to share the spoils of victory without troubling

themselves about the means to secure it. So the Liberals won an easy triumph.

The second surprise was of an equally disconcerting nature. Gladstone, after others had been sent for and failed, constructed a strong Liberal Administration, thereby showing that the supposition about his political disappearance had been a delusion of the first magnitude. Sir Stafford Northcote had always been a mild opponent of his former chief, and had never been able to shake off the private secretary's traditional feeling of respectful veneration. This amiable trait in his character had not done much harm during three years of leadership in the Commons with the party in power backed by a strong majority. But in opposition it was disastrous from the very first. One of the little group of Conservative free-lances once remarked that the Fourth Party would gladly have followed Sir Stafford Northcote if he had followed himself. It has never been denied that he was a weak leader. The most that has been said on this score in his defence is that he considered it 'bad policy for the minority to be frequently pitting itself against the majority. He held that such a course of proceeding

involved great waste of public time, and that it placed the Opposition in a disadvantageous position before the eyes of the country. In his opinion it was best to give the Government full swing, and to adopt the tactics of Fabius rather than those of Minutius.'¹

Whether or not Sir Stafford Northcote acted upon a well-defined principle of this nature, his slackness and want of bold initiative in opposition displeased Lord Randolph Churchill and his friends, who looked upon such feeble tactics as disastrous to the interests of the Conservative party. It was the emergency of the situation, which became apparent at the very commencement of the new Parliament, that created the Fourth Party, as it was afterwards named. The story of its inception will be told in due course. As in the history of many other political or social movements, it was brought about in a wholly fortuitous way. The necessities of the case favoured the bringing of energetic men to the front, and it was as much fate as design, as will be seen hereafter, that led the four belligerent Tories from concerted action to a definite political compact.

¹ *The Life of the Earl of Iddesleigh*, by Andrew Lang, 142.

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It must not be supposed, however, that the four men who had thus drifted together through common action at a critical period of the history of the House of Commons were merely drawn into sympathy by the recognised necessity of supplying an effective opposition to the Liberal Ministry. The necessity of the situation proved their opportunity, and it was the fighting instinct that first brought them together. For a long period afterwards the tie remained loose and undefined. But a higher and more durable element was brought into the relationship as time went on. Some of them had entered public life with political ideals, and with a higher conception of public duty than the undignified scramble for place and power which seems to be the main inspiration of so many politicians. When the Fourth Party grew into a definite political combination, its members were infected by these ideals, and presented themselves to the House of Commons and to the country not only in the light of brilliant free-lances, but in the more serious aspect of men inspired by a definite policy and determined to carry out its principles.

The Fourth Party created so much uproar and amusement, and appeared so often as the

author of political ingenuities which bordered upon practical joking, that its more solid qualities have not always obtained due recognition. They appear in the sober pages of Hansard, and may live in the recollection of those who helped or hindered the progress of Gladstone's reform measures at that time ; but the tradition handed down to posterity has mostly been that of an irreverent band, sprawling on the front bench below the gangway after the fashion of the celebrated ' Vanity Fair ' cartoon, and occupied in an incessant effort to hamper the business of the House by dodging its rules. The Fourth Party had its light side ; but to be effective in the House of Commons it is essential to avoid being dull. Even by their most exasperated victims, the four clever men who banded themselves together to supply to the Conservative opposition the backbone that its official chief lacked, and, as will be seen later, to second Lord Beaconsfield's policy during his lifetime and to rescue his ideals from oblivion after his death, were never accused of lacking wit and brilliance. Since the day when Disraeli kept the House in an uproar by the galling personalities he indulged in at Peel's expense, no such scenes were witnessed as those provoked

by the Fourth Party—always calm, smiling, and good-tempered in the midst of the turmoil they created. The combination was irresistible : recklessness allied with caution, brilliant wit backed by encyclopædic knowledge, fertility of invention restrained by sober judgment, passionate enthusiasm blended with frigid logic—the statesman, the lawyer, the diplomatist, the philosopher, the democrat, welded together into a political Frankenstein monster. The effect produced by the unison of these four men on the political situation from 1880 to 1885 was extraordinary. Within the space of a few weeks they achieved together a Parliamentary reputation that the most gifted individual member of the House of Commons can barely hope to win in half-a-dozen sessions. Varied in age, in temperament, in intellectual outfit and in experience, each possessed some special gift which contributed irresistibly to the success of their combined efforts.

Behind these qualities, which were sufficient in themselves to secure the attention of the most appreciative assembly in the world, was a unity of purpose that did not fail to obtain equal recognition both in and out of Parliament. Four such comrades-in-arms, if linked together

for the mere purpose of harrying their political opponents on every possible occasion, could not have failed to make their mark in the House of Commons ; but it was the comprehension that a definite and human policy inspired this concerted action that made the Fourth Party a real force in politics during the brief years of its existence.

The position in the House of Commons not only warranted, but even demanded, the formation of a free-lance party within the Conservative ranks. Besides the fact that the Liberals had been returned to power with a large working majority, the Treasury Bench contained an array of talent such as has not been seen grouped together at Westminster for the last twenty years. Gladstone, Bright, and W. E. Forster represented statesmanship of the first order ; Mr. Chamberlain and Sir Charles Dilke were the formidable exponents of a new and progressive Radicalism ; whilst the weight and influence of Lord Hartington added to the stability of the Administration. Against this tower of strength the surviving remnant of Lord Beaconsfield's scattered forces was hopelessly pitted. It is notorious that Lord Randolph Churchill greatly underrated the

sterling ability of Sir Stafford Northcote ; but he correctly gauged his fatal weakness as a leader of the Opposition. Seated between Sir Richard Cross and Mr. W. H. Smith, the Conservative chief never ventured to make a move without consulting his neighbours. This habit of indecision, coupled with an overwhelming and traditional respect for the Prime Minister, was disastrous to the interests of the party. That Lord Beaconsfield was himself painfully aware of the fact, and sympathised, in a large measure, with the progress of the Fourth Party rebellion, will be explained hereafter.

Such was the opportunity that offered itself to men of talent and ambition in the ranks of the disorganised and discredited Conservative party in the new Parliament. What manner of men they were who seized upon this chance with an audacity that will always remain a cherished tradition of the House of Commons, and what mental equipment they possessed for the task, may be gathered from a brief survey of their personal history.

CHAPTER II

THE MEMBER FOR WOODSTOCK

ALTHOUGH Lord Randolph Churchill had been swept into Parliament on the tide of the great Conservative victory in 1874, he was quite unknown to political fame when, in 1880, the Tories had to face benches crowded with Gladstone's triumphant legions as a pulverized minority. He was barely thirty-one years of age. The appearances he had put in during previous sessions were only fitful, and the few speeches he had made had not attracted any particular attention. To his fellow-members he was quite an unknown quantity. Those who knew him at all, knew him socially rather than politically. His prolonged absences from the House during the time when his father, the seventh Duke of Marlborough, was Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, although attributed in a large measure to some social quarrel, naturally produced the impression that the member for

Woodstock was anything but a keen politician. He had given, except, perhaps, to those who knew him intimately, little or no promise of the latent genius which was destined to electrify the House of Commons within the space of a few weeks; and even his friends regarded him then as a serious and quiet young man in the pursuit of an eminently respectable, orthodox career.

This estimation of Lord Randolph Churchill's character was scarcely warranted by his past history. His early years were passed amid more or less conventional surroundings. He went to school like other boys; and although his mischievous disposition showed itself at an early age, it is not recorded of him that he was 'swished' at Eton. Like most schoolboys who are destined to make much stir in the world, young Randolph Churchill was, nevertheless, always getting into scrapes of some kind and drawing down upon himself the kindly but majestic admonitions of the Duke. It was undoubtedly his generous and affectionate disposition that restrained him, for fear of paining or displeasing his parents, from giving full vent to his boyish spirits. One reads with delight of his 'muffing' the entrance examination at

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Oxford. There is something much more human about a brilliant man who has not always succeeded where ordinary educational tests are concerned. The punishment for this failure was six months with a 'crammer,' part of which was spent in a very happy and profitable way in travelling abroad. At this period Randolph Churchill evidently began to take some interest in politics, a circumstance that was, no doubt, largely brought about by the Duke's acceptance of the office of Lord President of the Council. 'I do hope,' he wrote to his father, 'you will be able to do something now, as it seems perhaps that the Conservatives have been placed in rather a humiliating position. I am so glad you are in the Cabinet; but Mr. Damer [his tutor] and I look forward to a change in the Cabinet policy.'¹

Games had no attraction for Randolph Churchill. He was no good at football or cricket, and disliked both heartily. On the other hand, sport was his main joy at this youthful period of his life. He rode to hounds when he was an Eton boy, and kept his own pack of 'Blenheim Harriers' at Oxford. An

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, by Winston S. Churchill, M.P., i. 23.

excellent story is narrated by Mr. Winston Churchill of his hunting adventures, from which it can be seen how early he developed the audacity that was the mainspring and inspiration of his brilliant political career. 'One day, early in the winter of 1868, when Lord Randolph was nearly twenty years old, he had the misfortune to ride too close to the Old Berkshire Hounds, and to incur the displeasure of their master (Tom Duffield), who rated him in a very violent fashion before the whole company. Lord Randolph was deeply offended. He went home at once ; but, as he said nothing at the moment, the incident was for a while forgotten. Towards the end of the season, however, a hunt dinner was held in Oxford, to which Mr. Duffield and many of the Old Berkshire field were bidden, and at which Lord Randolph was called upon to propose the toast of 'Fox-hunting.' He described himself as an enthusiast for all forms of sport. Fox-hunting, he said, he considered ranked first among field sports ; but he was himself very fond of hare-hunting too. 'So keen am I that, if I cannot get fox-hunting and cannot get hare-hunting, I like an afternoon with a terrier hunting a rat in a barn ; and if I can't get that,' he proceeded

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looking round with much deliberation, 'rather than dawdle indoors I'd go out with Tom Duffield and the Old Berkshire.' There was a minute of general consternation, which the orator complacently surveyed. Then the company, overcome by the audacity of the speaker, burst into laughter, led by Mr. Duffield himself.

Three years were passed at Merton College in this agreeable fashion, when Lord Randolph suddenly took it into his head to work. With him there were no half-measures. He dismissed the harriers, and set to work to read hard for the December examinations, with the result that he nearly secured a first class. Dr. Creighton, under whose influence he came whilst at Oxford, has related an incident of him that exhibited his real capacity for political life and gave evidence of his extraordinary independence and will-power. 'Soon after he came to Merton,' he wrote to a friend, 'he deemed it his duty to write a letter in defence of his father, who had been attacked on some question of Woodstock politics. Before sending the note he brought it to me. I was greatly impressed by its dignity and dexterity—the former, as the composition of a son about his father, the latter in the administration of a

reproof without leaving a loophole of escape.'¹ Dr. Creighton advised him, however, not to enter into political controversy at his time of life. Lord Randolph's answer was: 'I have thought it over and decided that point for myself. What I came to ask you was if you saw anything in the letter which you thought unbecoming.'

A year of European travel followed the conclusion of his University career, after which he appears to have settled down to a life of amusement and pleasure. This phase did not last long. In the summer of 1873 Lord Randolph Churchill met his future wife in the person of Miss Jerome, a young American girl, whose beauty and talent had won the admiration of everybody. A few months later they were married—not without vicissitudes and obstacles which served once again to bring out the high-spiritedness and independence of Lord Randolph's character. Meanwhile another event of great importance had taken place. To please the Duke more than anything else Lord Randolph had consented to stand for Woodstock at the next election. The dissolution came suddenly in January,

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 35.

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1874, and three months before his marriage he was duly returned to Parliament as the Conservative representative of the family borough.

‘The politics I profess,’ he said in his election address, ‘are strictly in accordance with those of the great leaders of the Conservative party which the borough of Woodstock has now so long supported.’ There was, however, a slight hint of the coming Tory Democrat. ‘Any measures that would ameliorate the condition of the working classes would ensure my best and most earnest assistance. My desire would be to place at their disposal, if it were possible, the common necessities and comforts of life free from the prohibitory impost of taxation.’ Otherwise but little light has been thrown upon Lord Randolph Churchill’s youthful political convictions. His maiden speech in the new Parliament, of which Disraeli wrote a favourable account to the Duchess of Marlborough, dealt entirely with university matters. But there is no record in the pages of Hansard of his having tackled a big subject; and his most successful effort at House of Commons oratory during the first few years of membership was an amusing speech about local affairs at Woodstock. The turning-

point in his career came in 1876, when the Duke was offered the Viceroyalty of Ireland. It was at this time that Lord Randolph's generous impetuosity, which led him to take a chivalrous part in the quarrels of others, caused him to incur a certain amount of social ostracism. He gladly seized the chance of leaving London, and spent at Dublin most of the time that elapsed before another change of Government took place.

Here he got into all sorts of society. He mixed with officials, with Nationalist politicians, with priests, and with aristocratic landowners. In this catholic way he began to study Irish politics and to form strong opinions of his own on the subject. He obtained a genuine insight into methods of Irish administration, and listened eagerly to all that was said by outsiders in criticism of it. With keen interest and intelligence he watched the struggles of rival Irish groups, the rise of Parnell, and the collapse of Mr. Butt, the founder of the Home Rule League—the victory of Fenianism over constitutional agitation. All these things impressed him deeply, and, when he visited Woodstock in the autumn of 1879, he quietly and characteristically blurted out the heterodox

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opinions he had formed, to the anger of the Tory Press and the extreme discomfiture of the Duke of Marlborough. This was the beginning of the unconventional, self-opinionated, devil-may-care Lord Randolph Churchill, who rescued the House of Commons from dulness and put new life into Conservative policy during the brief and stormy period of his activity. It was the only thing he had done, previous to the new Parliament of 1880, which had attracted any measure of public attention to his personality.

The Irish were not the only people who commanded Lord Randolph's sympathies at this time. Although he took no public part in the debates on the Eastern Question during the crisis in 1878, evidence has been furnished of the deep pity he felt for the nationalities oppressed by Turkish rule. At one time he actually contemplated moving a resolution in the House of Commons, calling on the Government to make efforts towards the establishment of complete freedom and independence for the population of the provinces in question. Communications on the subject passed between this unconventional Tory and some of the Liberal leaders. 'If I were asked to move

a resolution,' he wrote to Sir Charles Dilke, 'my speech would be an attack on Chaplin, Wolff, and the rest of the pro-Turkish party, confidence in the Government, and an invitation to the Liberal party to act as a whole. I feel I am awfully young to endeavour to initiate such a motion; but I am so convinced of the soundness of our view that I would risk a smash willingly to have that properly brought forward.'¹ Lord Randolph asserted his belief that some Conservatives could be found to support such a resolution, but when pressed on the point was unable to suggest a single name that could be depended upon. Eventually, therefore, the intention was abandoned. The incident is interesting in showing those democratic leanings which, early in the Fourth Party days, developed into settled policy.

When the General Election came in March, 1880, Lord Randolph Churchill was re-elected by a majority of sixty, and went up to Westminster to take the oath of allegiance full of good intentions as to more regular attention to Parliamentary duties. 'Starting with many advantages, he was still at thirty-one obscure,' Mr. Winston Churchill tells us. 'Four or five

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i 103.

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speeches in as many years had made no particular impression, and the House of Commons had scarcely formed an opinion about him. Vexed, on the one hand, by liberal and pacific sentiments, and restrained on the other by affection for the Conservative party, to which he was bound by so many ties of friendship and tradition, and, above all, by respect for his father, he was prevented during those years from taking any clear or decided action which might have enlisted sympathy or commanded attention. Out-of-doors among the people he was unknown. Adverse social influences denied the recognition of such ability as he had shown. His party was now humbled in the dust. His own family borough lay under the shadow of an approaching Reform Bill. New Ministers and new measures occupied the public mind. Grave and violent dangers beset the State, and no one troubled to think about an undistinguished sprig of the nobility. Nevertheless, his hour had come.'

CHAPTER III

LORD RANDOLPH'S COLLEAGUES

HAVING entered Parliament as early as 1866, Mr. John Eldon Gorst naturally possessed greater experience of political affairs than the other members of the Fourth Party. He was regarded by them, in fact, as their encyclopædia, to whom they could always turn for information and guidance in moments of emergency. At the beginning of 1880 he was looked upon by the House of Commons generally as a rising man, and by some of the Conservative leaders whose consciences pricked them as a dangerous one. They had served him badly when in power; had vainly endeavoured to keep him out of Parliament after the services he had rendered the party in 1874; and had had reason, in the course of the long spell of office that preceded the Conservative smash-up in 1880, to regret their failure in this respect. Mr. Gorst was forty-five years old

when he joined the little group of rebellious spirits below the gangway. He had had valuable experience of administrative work in the Colonies; had devoted some of his best years to reorganising the Conservative party; had acquired a sound legal training through 'devilling' for Sir John Holker, the Attorney-General in the Beaconsfield Government; and was a clear and effective speaker, who possessed the ear of the House, and who always had something unconventional to say that was generally too true to be palatable.

- Born at Preston in 1835, he was educated at the grammar-school. His main achievement as a schoolboy was the founding of a journal, which he edited himself and called 'The Scholar.' This publication, which was printed and issued at regular intervals, survived a whole year. It was then suppressed by the school authorities on account of its free outspokenness on all subjects discussed in its columns. From Preston, John Gorst went to Cambridge, where he took his degree in 1857, and was elected immediately to a Fellowship of St. John's College. The fact that he was only third in the Mathematical Tripos was a great disappointment both to his relations, who had foregathered to take

part in the anticipated rejoicings, and to his College. It had been so confidently expected that he would come out Senior Wrangler that relays of St. John's men were posted from the Senate House to the neighbourhood of his rooms, in order that the glad tidings might be conveyed to him with the least possible delay. The tidings were so slow in coming, however, that the disconsolate Third Wrangler guessed his fate before they arrived. Mr. Todhunter, the well-known Cambridge coach, afterwards consoled his pupil by remarking to him : ' I never knew a man take so high a mathematical degree who knew so little mathematics as you.' As a matter of fact, John Gorst had by no means devoted himself exclusively to the study of mathematics, but had given up a good deal of his time to scientific studies. The first chemical laboratory had just been established at Cambridge University by St. John's College, and Gorst was amongst the first pupils of Professor Liveing at that institution.

Having taken his degree and finished his academic career, Mr. Gorst, who was now twenty-two years of age, very naturally proceeded to enjoy himself. It was the end of

January, and, his elder brother being away in Egypt and Palestine, he borrowed his horses, and spent the rest of the winter season in hunting at his uncle's place in Durham. This period of exercise was followed by a lengthy trip abroad, where he wandered through Switzerland, the Engadine (which had not then been 'discovered'), Tyrol and Austria, visiting Vienna and Prague, and finally settling down at Dresden to learn German. On returning to England he read law in the chambers of Mr. Christie, the eminent conveyancer, and began to eat his dinners at the Inner Temple. In the autumn of 1858 his father, Mr. E. C. Lowndes (the eldest son always takes this surname on succeeding to the family property), had a stroke of apoplexy. The reading in chambers was accordingly abandoned, and Mr. Gorst hurried away to Lancashire, where, in order to be near his father during his few remaining days, he took a voluntary post as mathematical master at Rossall School.

At this period of his life Mr. Gorst began to form the resolution, on which he afterwards acted, to leave England and try a more active existence in the Colonies. He discussed the plan with his father, who approved of it

When, therefore, the latter died in 1859, he set sail for New Zealand, uncertain what the future might have in store for him, but determined, through weariness of a tame and unadventurous life in England, to encounter any vicissitudes that gave promise of variety. Before starting on the voyage he had been very ill with scarlet-fever, and had nearly died. His health, in fact, for the first week or two on board ship was so bad that the captain of the vessel remarked to another passenger—who was destined, curiously enough, to be Mr. Gorst's future wife—'I fear we shall have to put that poor fellow in the sea before we get to the line.' Having become engaged on the voyage to Miss Moore, the daughter of a retired officer of the Indian Army whose father had represented Dublin University in the House of Commons, the young couple, notwithstanding the captain's gloomy prediction to the lady, were married in Australia. From there they migrated to New Zealand, as Mr. Gorst had originally planned, arriving in the summer of 1860.

The colony was in a state of ferment. A native rising had taken place in a province of the North Island, and the Maori question was entering on an acute stage. The trouble was

arising in the Waikato district. The Maories, having no faith in a Government from which they had expected much, but which, owing to its lack of resources and to administrative incompetence, had done so little for them, had set up a king of their own. It was essential, if British supremacy were to be maintained, that the authority of the Maori king should be promptly destroyed. The question to be decided was the best policy by which this obviously necessary end might be attained. Mr. Gorst, after thoroughly acquainting himself through personal investigation with the merits of the case, published his views in some letters contributed anonymously to the 'New Zealander,' which attracted a great deal of attention at the time. As may be gathered from the following extract, they contain not only a characteristic example of the convictions to which the writer frequently gave expression in Parliament in after years, but show remarkable sympathy with Lord Randolph Churchill's attitude of mind, at the same age, towards the oppressed populations in the Turkish provinces.

'The advocates of a policy of concession,' he wrote, 'labour under a preliminary disadvantage, inasmuch as there is popularly

supposed to be something pre-eminently manly in gaining an end by downright strength. Seeing that it is in mental and not in bodily powers that men surpass beasts, I should have been disposed to call persuasion manly, and physical force brutal ; but usage is against me. There is one display of force, however, that has never been dignified by the name "manly"—that of the strong towards the weak. The public may look upon the encounter of Sayers and Heenan as an exhibition of manliness, but no one regards the flogging of a child or beating a wife in the same favourable light. Neither will the world at large think that there is much glory in a highly civilised nation of 28,000,000 of men crushing 50,000 "half-naked savages." It may be an act of necessary severity, but will add nothing to the honour of Great Britain.

‘Out of regard to our national honour, therefore, it becomes us to advocate every other means rather than the employment of force against so feeble a foe. In order to discover the policy by which the Maori king may be put down it is absolutely indispensable that we should inquire into the cause which led to his being set up.

'I do not enter upon this branch of my subject with any desire to make a vulgar attack on either the character or sagacity of those who have had the conduct of native affairs. It is always easy to criticise the acts of any Government after the results are seen. It is the duty of all sober persons to provide for the future rather than to censure the past, and to revert to bygone acts of government not for the purpose of abusing their authors, but of gaining experience for the future.'

Mr. Gorst had made friends with Tamihana, the most powerful chief in the Waikato district, who was generally known to the colonists as William Thompson. Tamihana stopped the fighting, and begged his new English friend to go and see him. They talked over the whole trouble, and eventually Mr. Gorst accepted the proposal that he should go to Auckland, lay the grievances of the natives before Governor Browne, and act as an intermediary between them and the Government. Governor Browne, however, had no belief in Tamihana, and the matter hung fire until the arrival of Sir George Grey, who had been sent out by the Home Government to deal with the situation. A suspension of hostilities took place during the

following year and a half, when Sir George Grey appointed Mr. Gorst, first, Inspector of Native and Missionary Schools in Waikato, then Resident Magistrate, and finally Civil Commissioner of the Upper Waikato district. When the Maori war broke out on a large scale in 1863, he had to fly the country with his wife and two young children, their lives being saved through the powerful patronage of the chief Tamihana.

After these exciting adventures Mr. Gorst was able to settle down to the existence that had formerly appeared so distasteful to him. He returned to England, recommenced 'eating his dinners,' and was called to the Bar in 1865. Having now acquired a taste for public life, he accepted an invitation to stand as Conservative candidate for Hastings at the General Election in that year, but was defeated. In the following year, however, a seat was found for him at Cambridge. One of the two sitting members was disqualified, and, on the recommendation of Mr. (now Sir Francis) Powell, the surviving colleague, Mr. Gorst was elected in his place. The new member's maiden speech—the most terrifying ordeal in his recollection—was concerned with the proposed abolition of Church

rates, which, he explained to the House, would fall more heavily on poor widows, who received their chief support from Church alms, than upon anybody else. The first speech that attracted any attention was delivered in the following session. Mr. Gorst on that occasion made a vigorous attack on Mr. Adderley, the Under-Secretary for the Colonies, taking up the cudgels on behalf of the colonists of Ceylon, who had been disgracefully oppressed by military expenditure. When he sat down after this exploit, Mr. Spencer Walpole came round to his seat and remarked: 'I thought you would like to know that Mr. Disraeli was extremely pleased with your smart attack on Mr. Adderley.' This was the first time that the new member for Cambridge had come under the notice of his chief, and, although the appreciation was as unexpected as it was highly unconventional in the circumstances, it gave him great encouragement. When Disraeli, later in the session, was passing his Reform Bill, an attempt was made to secure the franchise to university residents who were disqualified on account of living within college precincts. Mr. Gorst was actively concerned in this movement, and Disraeli sent for him

and explained that, although he himself thought the demand perfectly just, it would not be possible to carry it in the House at the time. It would be a pity, he said, to persist to the point of incurring defeat in a division.

In December, 1868, came the General Election, and the Conservatives were completely beaten on the new register. Disraeli at once resolved to reorganise. He cast about for some clever and energetic young man in the party to whom the task might be entrusted, and his choice fell upon Mr. Gorst, who readily agreed to devote himself for the next few years to the invention and establishment of new party machinery throughout the country. The work was commenced at once, and from 1869 to 1874 Mr. Gorst was engaged, almost day and night, in planning and preparing the great Conservative victory of the latter year. He neglected his practice at the Bar, and, refusing the salary that was offered him, gave his entire services to this end. 'If the party comes into power,' said Disraeli to his young lieutenant, 'you can look with certainty for some substantial gratification of your laudable ambition.' At that time Lord Cairns was Disraeli's right-hand man; and

whilst the work of reorganisation was going on the only help given was by the ex-Lord Chancellor, Colonel Taylor, the old Tory Whip, and his successor, Mr. Gerard Noel. The late Lord Derby also rendered what assistance he could ; but the rest of the party held aloof, under the impression that the Conservatives were hopelessly defeated for many years to come. The extent to which this was realised by Disraeli himself was evidenced when Gladstone suddenly dissolved Parliament early in 1874. Directly Mr. Gorst heard the news he rushed off to the Conservative leader's house, and found him just coming down to breakfast in his dressing-gown. 'Find out where Cairns and Derby are, and get them to come and see me immediately,' were Disraeli's instructions. 'You needn't trouble about anybody else unless you want help in the elections. In that case send for Taylor.' Mr. Noel, the Chief Whip, was then ill, and his services were therefore not available. Nobody else was troubled about, or came forward with any offers of assistance.

Everybody knows the result. For the first time since the days of Peel the Conservative party obtained a clear working majority. The

deserters instantly rushed back to the fold, eager to divide the spoils of victory. The plums of office were distributed impartially amongst those who had borne no share in the battle, whilst the man who had engineered the triumph, but who had too much sense of the dignity of public life to press forward claims that were sufficiently obvious, was left entirely out in the cold. There was talk afterwards of a dinner and the presentation of some plate, but nothing came of it. Perhaps it is due to Lord Beaconsfield to mention the fact that he apologised to Mr. Gorst for this treatment before his term of office expired. 'Why did you not come and ask me for something?' he said. 'I have always been accustomed to people pestering me for appointments, and could not understand your keeping away. You have been very badly treated, and I am extremely sorry for it.' After this explanation Mr. Gorst never bore his leader the least personal resentment; but his relations with some other influential members of the party were far from cordial. They had, after 1874, done their best to oppose his re-entering Parliament, and his successful candidature for Chatham in 1875 was accomplished in spite of

active opposition at headquarters. When Mr. Gorst took his seat below the gangway, he was naturally inspired not altogether by benevolent feelings towards the Treasury Bench, and during that Parliament more than one breezy encounter resulted from the strained relationship. The ill-feeling came to a head when the member for Chatham brought a scandalous occurrence in the island of Tanna before the House in 1876 or 1877. An Englishman had been murdered by a native of this Melanesian island, and the British Government had sent a man-of-war to the spot to punish the murderer. The offender had taken flight, however, and could not be found; whereupon the expeditionary force seized his brother and hanged him instead. Mr. Gorst made the best of his brief, and delivered such an attack upon the Government that his own chief, Sir John Holker, for whom he was then 'devilling,' lost his temper and delivered a very angry rejoinder. The incident was followed by an exceedingly acrimonious debate, in the course of which Sir Charles Dilke said that the member for Chatham had been subjected to monstrous treatment; and the moral atmosphere was not cooled

by Mr. Gorst dividing the House against the Government.

The General Election of 1880 swept many members of the Conservative party out of political existence; but it brought back the member for Chatham by a substantial majority after a stiff fight in the constituency. The collapse of the Tories was so complete that Sir Stafford Northcote and Mr. W. H. Smith, in their despair, begged Mr. Gorst once more to undertake the work of reorganisation by bringing their electoral machinery, on which the Liberals had vastly improved, up to date. The lesson of 1874 might well have prompted a refusal; but Mr. Gorst consented to come to the rescue. On finding, however, that he was not offered the free hand Disraeli had given him, he resigned what gave promise of proving a thankless as well as an uphill task. This, then, was the position in which he stood at the beginning of the new Parliament in 1880. His one friend amongst the Conservative leaders was Lord Beaconsfield, whose days, unhappily, were numbered. The others regarded him with the distrust and dislike with which human beings always look upon those to whom they have returned evil for good. He had proved

himself to be a first-rate organiser ; his knowledge of Parliamentary procedure was universally recognised ; he was one of the cleverest debaters in the House of Commons ; and he was a man of marked independence, self-reliant, and fertile in resource.

The originator of the Fourth Party, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, was well known at the time of its inception not only to the House of Commons, but to the world outside. He had brought with him a considerable reputation into political life, when he was first returned member for Christchurch in 1874; both as a successful diplomatist and as a shrewd and witty personality, who was extremely popular in London society. His knowledge of Eastern affairs, obtained at first hand, had enabled him to make his mark in politics during his first Parliament, when the acute crisis in the Near East concentrated universal attention on the subject. Disraeli showed special confidence in his knowledge and abilities, as will be seen presently. In a letter to Sir Charles Dilke, dated February 15, 1878, Lord Randolph Churchill spoke of 'Chaplin, Wolff, and the rest of the pro-Turkish party,'¹ thus showing

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 103.

the prominent position Sir Henry Wolff then occupied in relation to Eastern affairs. Henry Drummond Wolff was born in 1830. He was the son of the Rev. Dr. Wolff, a traveller and scholar of European reputation, whom posterity will always honour for his heroic though vain efforts to rescue the captive British officers at Bokhara, and Lady Georgiana Walpole, sister of the Earl of Orford. His father sent him to be educated at Rugby, where he had the honour of receiving condign punishment at the hands of Dr. Tait, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury; and it was always his impression when, in later years, he talked to the Archbishop on matters of serious importance, that there was a twinkle in his Grace's eye to show that he had by no means forgotten the circumstance. After this very human, if academically undistinguished, career at Rugby, Henry Wolff spent some years on the Continent, where he acquired the knowledge of languages which proved so useful to him in his diplomatic career. Lord Palmerston appointed him to the Foreign Office in 1846, where he served a preliminary apprenticeship in deciphering despatches. He was then attached in turn to the Legations at Florence and Brussels. The important

point in his career was now to come. Having been private secretary first to Lord Malmesbury, and afterwards to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, he was offered the post of Chief Secretary of the Government of the Ionian Islands. It was in this capacity that he obtained a thorough acquaintance with the ins and outs of the Eastern Question.

His residence in the Ionian Islands extended over a period of five years. During this time he was charged with more than one official mission to Constantinople, and was also the principal agent in the annexation of the islands to Greece. When the latter event took place Sir Henry Wolff, who had been created a K.C.M.G. in 1862, retired from the public service and returned to England with the intention of entering Parliament. After some ineffectual attempts, he was at last elected member for Christchurch, where his early friend Lord Malmesbury had considerable influence and where he himself possessed some property. In the autumn of 1870 Sir Henry Wolff paid a visit to Spa. The Franco-Prussian war was then raging; Bazaine's army of 300,000 men was shut up in Metz; Marshal McMahon and the Emperor had just surrendered on the field

of Sedan ; and Strasburg was in process of being invested. 'It was impossible,' wrote Sir Henry Wolff to a friend, 'to remain at Spa, so near the seat of war, without attempting to see something.' Accordingly, he started off on three adventurous trips, which contained, as it afterwards proved, a considerable element of danger. He was accompanied on different occasions by friends, amongst whom were Mr. James (now Lord James of Hereford), Mr. Richard Baring, and two ex-M.P.s. Armed with a plentiful supply of cigars, which wounded and half-starved soldiers appreciate more than food or drink or clothing, they commenced their exciting but melancholy pilgrimage through the terrible scenes of recent battle-fields. At Sedan they found posted up at a street corner a proclamation by the Emperor, dated August 31, announcing his intention to abandon the command of the troops to his Marshals and to fight in the ranks as a simple soldier. From a member of the Emperor's staff he learnt that the French at Sedan had employed no cannon of a date later than the battle of Waterloo!

On another occasion, having penetrated as far as the immediate neighbourhood of Stras-

burg, Sir Henry Wolff and his party had an unpleasant adventure. To get a better view of the siege they mounted a wall not far from a Prussian battery. Gunners in the besieged town naturally mistook them for scouts or spies, and before they were fully aware of what was happening shells began to whistle past their ears. After travelling about and seeing everything for himself in this way, Sir Henry summed up the impressions he had gathered in a letter, published subsequently in the 'Morning Post,' addressed to a friend in England. 'I think it right to add my belief,' he wrote, 'in which Mr. James also concurs, that there have been but very rare cases of undue harshness or oppression on the part of the German troops. They readily acknowledge the courage and devotion of the French, attributing their defeat entirely to bad generalship. We traversed a considerable part of the conquered territory. We never once saw a drunken man, nor heard but once an angry word, nor witnessed arrogance or exultation. The desire of the German army is for a secure and permanent peace. If that be obtained, I am convinced they will not be the first to break it.'

When member for Christchurch, Sir Henry Wolff, whose thorough knowledge of Eastern politics had secured him a good deal of attention in Parliament, was charged by Disraeli to take an active part in defending the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. This he did with great ability, proposing, when Gladstone moved his vote of censure on the Eastern policy of the Government, an amendment which was carried by the large majority of 131. Later on, he was selected by Lord Salisbury to be the British Commissioner on the International Commission for the reorganisation of Eastern Roumelia. In this capacity he contributed much to the withdrawal of the Russian army from Bulgaria, and for the services which he had rendered to secure this result he was made K.C.B. At this time he was already on friendly terms with Lord Randolph Churchill and Mr. Balfour. He had often met the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough at Heron Court, Lord Malmesbury's place near Christchurch, and he had been acquainted with Lady Randolph before her marriage. Consequently, he was brought into frequent contact with the member for Woodstock, and the firm friendship that developed out of the acquaintance was some

way advanced before the Fourth Party days cemented the tie. Sir Henry Wolff had also been long associated with Mr. Balfour through meeting him continually at Hatfield and in Arlington Street, where he was a frequent guest of Lord and Lady Salisbury ; nor was Mr. Gorst altogether a stranger to him, as both had for some years been closely connected with the National Union of Conservative Associations.

Sir Henry Drummond Wolff was forty-nine years of age when, as newly elected member for Portsmouth, he stood up in the House of Commons and unconsciously inaugurated the Fourth Party by bearding Bradlaugh. He was just the kind of man to inspire the brilliant idea of such an association. Full of humour and vivacity, as cunning in politics as in diplomacy, the soul of good-humour and worldly wisdom, with an innate love of the subtleties of political intrigue, he invited co-operation by making a pleasure of toil. Lord Randolph Churchill had already begun to appreciate these qualities ; he now saw them turned to account with an adroitness almost amounting to genius. Mr. Gorst quickly grasped the cleverness of the man and the far-reaching possibilities of his opposition

[to Bradlaugh; whilst Mr. Balfour's languid interest in political affairs was stimulated to activity by the new spirit that he instilled, as if by magic, into the dull routine of Parliamentary life. It is certainly probable that neither Lord Randolph Churchill, Mr. Gorst, nor Mr. Balfour would have formed any cohesive independent group without Sir Henry Wolff. There was a genial magnetism about the latter which drew the Fourth Party into focus in the first instance, and kept it together until a community of interest had been firmly established amongst its members. He was always the peacemaker when storms threatened, and was the only one of the four who remained to the last on friendly terms with all his partners.

Mr. Lucy, one of the acutest observers of politics and politicians who ever sat in the Press Gallery of the House of Commons, once called Mr. Balfour 'the odd man of the Fourth Party.' The description was a happy one. The future Prime Minister never threw himself heart and soul into the business of independent opposition. He always thought it impolitic to give any handle to the supposition that the Conservative party was a house divided against

itself. This inner conviction, coupled with an inherent disinclination to lead the strenuous Parliamentary life, had a rather dampening effect on the outward zeal with which he acted in harmony with his three colleagues. The visible bond was certainly more intangible in the case of Mr. Balfour, and formed a somewhat striking contrast to the whole-hearted and unaffected association of the others. It was probably this circumstance that gave rise a few years ago to a report, started by some misinformed newspaper writer, that Mr. Balfour had never belonged to the Fourth Party at all. The inaccuracy of the statement may be judged from the fact that the member for Hertford, as he then was, travelled up to town from his estate in Scotland early in November, 1880, on purpose to sit, with the rest of his friends, to 'Spy' of 'Vanity Fair' for the famous cartoon representing the Fourth Party in the House of Commons. 'I shall be haggard and ghastly of hue from the effects of a night journey,' he protested to one of them; 'but that will be taken to be a consequence of the anxiety and labour which my Parliamentary efforts on behalf of my country have forced me to undergo, and of the pain which the

behaviour of my colleagues has so often inflicted.'

Mr. Balfour's colleagues were perfectly well aware of his views on the subject of the Fourth Party, which he never attempted to conceal from them. He expressed the opinion that its existence ought always to be denied in public. They should always assert, he said, that the name was a joke, and a device of the enemy to sow dissension in the Conservative party. What they ought to aim at, both for their own sakes and for that of the party at large, was the largest possible amount of real independence and the smallest possible appearance of it. This was certainly not the attitude generally adopted by the famous group below the gangway; and it was the endeavour of the member for Hertford to act up to his own convictions in this respect that caused him to be regarded as 'the odd man.'

It cannot be said that Arthur James Balfour's early training was particularly calculated to fit him to play an energetic part in one of the stormiest episodes of our Parliamentary history. He was born in 1848 at Whittingehame, his father's place in East Lothian. Lady Blanche Balfour, his mother,

was a sister of the late Lord Salisbury, and it was undoubtedly this relationship that influenced Mr. Balfour, rather against his natural inclination, to enter public life. Having lost his father at an early age, a certain measure of responsibility devolved upon the boy as heir to the estate, and this may have been largely productive of his quiet and thoughtful disposition. We find him at as young an age as twelve making a speech to the tenants on behalf of himself and his mother. During the cotton famine in Lancashire Lady Blanche Balfour taught her children a lesson in practical sympathy. To make them appreciate the hard lot of the operatives she let them run the house. It fell to Arthur Balfour's lot not only to black the boots and clean the knives, but to partake of rations cooked by his sisters—a hard lesson in domestic economy, but an excellent preparation for fagging at Eton. At school he distinguished himself by carrying off a prize for an historical essay which his tutor described as 'a really remarkable piece of work, full of thoughtfulness, and containing the germs of intellectual power.' By a curious coincidence Arthur Balfour became Lord Lansdowne's fag at Eton, and, thanks to early experience in the conduct of household

duties, it is recorded of him that he made a very efficient one.¹

When Mr. Balfour was eighteen years old he went to Cambridge, where he entered Trinity College. Although he worked hard for his degree, which he took four years later, he failed to distinguish himself beyond the average of good men. His studious habits led him, nevertheless, to do a good deal of solid reading on his own account, the results of which were afterwards given to the world in the form of philosophical works. In 1874 Mr. Balfour was returned to Parliament unopposed for the borough of Hertford, through the influence of his uncle, Lord Salisbury. That politics bored him rather than otherwise is shown by the fact that he spent the following year in making a grand tour round the world, visiting America and the Australasian colonies. It was not until the third session after his return to the House of Commons that he attempted his maiden speech, choosing for the ordeal the unpromising subject of bimetallism. His success did not encourage him to speak again

¹ Most of the details concerning Mr. Balfour's early life have been taken from *Arthur James Balfour: the Man and his Work*, by Bernard Alderson, to whom the author's acknowledgments are due.

until the year following, when he made a speech in favour of the extension of women's educational privileges. Neither these nor any subsequent speeches delivered in that Parliament gained Mr. Balfour any reputation in the House. 'He was always a pretty speaker,' says Mr. Lucy of him at this period, 'with a neat turn for saying nasty things. But as he sprawled on the bench below the gangway he was taken for a Parliamentary *dilettante*, a trifler with debate, anxious chiefly, in some leisure moments, to practise the paces learned in the hall of the Union at Cambridge.'

In 1878 Mr. Balfour went to the Berlin Congress as Lord Salisbury's private secretary, and there acquired a taste for foreign politics. Soon after his return to England he published his 'Defence of Philosophic Doubt,' which gave many persons who had not read it the impression that the author was an atheist writing to justify his convictions. The book was widely reviewed, and an unkind critic afterwards said that it was 'more praised than read.' In the House of Commons the circumstance added an interest to Mr. Balfour's somewhat indefinite personality. Nobody thought, when Gladstone was returned to power in 1880,

that the metaphysical and inactive member for Hertford was pre-destined to a brilliant political career. Lord Beaconsfield, it must be remembered, was still alive, and the question of his successor in the leadership of the Conservative party had not been raised in any general way. But there was, naturally, some private speculation on the subject, and it was mostly held that the leadership would devolve upon Sir Stafford Northcote in preference to Lord Salisbury. Mr. Balfour's future prospects, therefore, were not connected with any possibility of the kind. Even had Lord Salisbury been the recognised successor to Lord Beaconsfield, it would never have occurred to anybody that this fact might be of much consequence to his nephew. Mr. Balfour had exhibited but little Parliamentary ability: he was an indifferent speaker; his apparent lack of interest in general public affairs was almost indecent. He was the last man in whom anybody, before the Fourth Party stirred him into animation and brought out his latent abilities, would have foreseen a brilliant leader of the Conservative party and a future Prime Minister.

CHAPTER IV

ACTING TOGETHER

ONE of the most extraordinary, and in a sense ridiculous, episodes in the House of Commons was engineered by the future Fourth Party, and served, in fact, to bring its members together in the first instance. Before Bradlaugh was returned to Parliament as Mr. Labouchere's colleague at Northampton, scores of atheists had quietly taken the oath and sat in the House of Commons. It never occurred to anybody to dispute their right to do so ; and the unbelievers themselves looked, very sensibly, upon the swearing-in of members as a harmless and necessary ceremonial, to which no ghost of an objection need be raised.

Bradlaugh would probably have taken the same view, and the incident of his entry into Parliament would have passed off without any fuss, if he had not asserted his principles so violently in public that a tame submission to

the orthodox Parliamentary oath would have ruined his reputation as an uncompromising opponent of religious conviction. With the eye of the whole country upon his every act, Bradlaugh was impelled to do something out of the common. Accordingly, instead of getting himself sworn by the clerk at the table when he presented himself at the House three days after the opening of the new Parliament in 1880, he handed in a written request that he should be permitted to make an affirmation instead.

The newly-appointed Speaker, disconcerted at the novelty of the situation, refused to give a decision from the Chair, and elected to leave the matter to the judgment of the House. This course of action was naturally embarrassing to the Liberal Government. It placed it in an extremely invidious position. On the one hand, Bradlaugh's claim as a supporter and a member of the party rendered opposition to his taking his seat a disagreeable and ungrateful task ; whilst, on the other, there was great hostility to the personality of Bradlaugh, both inside and outside the House of Commons, amongst men of all parties and creeds. The Ministry was 'between the devil and the deep sea' ; but it might have escaped

from the dilemma with the minimum of discredit had it not been for the initiative of Sir Henry Wolff, backed up by the energetic co-operation of two of the other members of the future Fourth Party. The credit for the endless dispute into which the affair subsequently developed was entirely theirs. Sir Stafford Northcote, the official leader of the Opposition, only supported the tactics adopted by Sir Henry Wolff and his friends when their value had become obvious. Left to himself, it is doubtful if any political capital would have been made out of the situation. The Opposition leader either hesitated to embarrass the Government on the threshold of its career, or else failed through lack of energy or foresight to seize upon the opportunity that offered itself. It was this initial display of weakness that led Sir Henry Wolff to give the cue to the Opposition, and that provided the impetus to the formation of a political combination which equally strengthened the Opposition and exposed the weakness of the Conservative leaders in the House of Commons.

The Committee that had been appointed to inquire into Bradlaugh's claim to affirm reported against its validity. The new member for

Northampton, however, before waiting for the decision of the House on the point, promptly made up his mind to take the oath. He had always maintained that he regarded the taking of an oath as a meaningless proceeding ; and he now wrote an injudicious letter to the papers, repeating this view, but announcing his determination to present himself forthwith at the table of the House with the object of going through the ordinary ceremonial of being sworn in. The letter was followed up by immediate action. Meanwhile Sir Henry Wolff, highly delighted with the success of the preliminary skirmish, prepared a neat and dramatic surprise for the House of Commons. When Bradlaugh, true to his word, advanced to the table in order to take the oath, Sir Henry Wolff sprang up and objected ; three times he reiterated his protest, when the Speaker, after momentary hesitation, allowed the objection and ordered Mr. Bradlaugh to withdraw. The situation provoked an immediate storm. The member for Northampton retired from the House, leaving Sir Henry Wolff in possession to argue his case.

Amid loud cries of 'Move, move!' Sir Henry Wolff commenced his speech. 'I shall

conclude with a motion,' he assured the House. He had armed himself for the task by procuring a handful of pamphlets printed by the Free Thought Publishing Company. Amongst these was a paper by Bradlaugh entitled 'A Plea for Atheism,' from which he proceeded to quote the opening words: 'It is as a propagandist of atheism that I pen this essay.' Sir Henry Wolff then alluded to the letter which Bradlaugh had sent to the papers. 'It is perfectly clear,' he said, 'from the letter written by the hon. gentleman which appears in the newspapers to-day that he regards the taking of the oath as a proceeding of a meaningless character, and he says that it will be so much the worse for those who have forced him to repeat words which convey to his mind no clear and definite meaning.'

The resolution against Bradlaugh being permitted to take the oath having been moved, a long and excited debate ensued, in which the leaders on both sides took part. It was adjourned by a motion seconded by Lord Randolph Churchill, who, in coming to Sir Henry Wolff's aid in this way, took the first step towards future united action. The above scene had taken place on Friday, May 21.

When the debate was resumed on the following Monday, Lord Randolph Churchill delivered a brilliant speech, which brought his commanding talents for the first time into general notice, and drew from Sir Stafford Northcote the acknowledgment, privately noted in his diary, that he had spoken 'very well and dexterously.'¹ The Bradlaugh case had already brought considerable heat into the moral atmosphere of the House of Commons; but the youthful member for Woodstock quickly galvanized the assembly into positive tumult. His fire and impetuosity brought a new element into the discussion, which had hitherto been maintained upon almost academic lines, save for the somewhat dramatic interposition of Sir Henry Wolff. The House now listened in amazement to Lord Randolph's diatribe. Hitherto the question had been debated chiefly in respect to the legal aspect of the case. This view was brushed angrily aside by the new speaker. It was a question, he declared, to be decided on general principles, and they ought not to allow pettifogging technicalities to be introduced into the discussion by law officers, who were apt to

¹ *Life and Letters of Sir Stafford Northcote*, by Andrew Lang, ii. 159.

confuse the proceedings of the House with the proceedings of the Old Bailey.

Lord Randolph Churchill was holding in his hand a pamphlet written by Bradlaugh entitled 'The Impeachment of the House of Brunswick,' of which the enormous number of 180,000 had been sold to the public. He and Sir Henry Wolff were old friends, and hearing that the latter had secured some of the Bradlaugh literature, he had gone to him for information and help. The reading of these pamphlets, which in many passages were more outspoken than delicate, had fired him with indignation. Before the end of his speech he produced this particularly obnoxious essay, and quoted from it an extract which he declared to be a fair specimen of its contents. 'I loathe these small German breast-bested wanderers,' it ran, 'whose only merit is their loving hatred of one another. In their own land they vegetate and wither unnoticed. Here we pay them highly to marry and perpetuate a pauper-prince race. If they do nothing, they are good ; if they do ill, loyalty gilds the vice till it looks like virtue.' Having read out these words in a voice trembling with passion, Lord Randolph flung the offending paper on the floor and crushed it

under his heel. It was a dramatic moment. The opponents of Bradlaugh's entry cheered the impulsive action to the echo; a few shouted their angry disapproval. When the House subsided, Lord Randolph went on with his speech, which he concluded by turning to the Treasury Bench and making an eloquent appeal to Gladstone. 'Do not let it be in our power to say,' he exclaimed, 'that the first time you led the Liberal party through the Lobby in this new Parliament it was for the purpose of placing on those benches opposite an avowed atheist and a professedly disloyal person.'

The debate on this night led the future Fourth Party to act together in a perfectly spontaneous and independent way. When Bradlaugh presented himself at the table three weeks previously, for the purpose of affirming, Mr. Gorst had spoken during the ensuing debate, supporting a motion for adjournment on the ground that the leaders on the Ministerial side and several of the Opposition leaders, whose advice ought to be invoked, were absent. Since that incident he had on several occasions taken an active part in the proceedings, and had backed up Sir Henry Wolff, in one instance, by raising a point of order. Mr. Gorst now

took up Lord Randolph's cue, stating that the real question was whether the House would sanction the oath of allegiance being profaned ; and before he sat down he referred pointedly to the fact that the House had been protected from this, not by its leader, but by Sir Henry Wolff. Later in the evening Sir Henry Wolff made a short but effective speech ; and it thus came about that three of the future partners were drawn into closer sympathy than heretofore, if not into actual combination. There was a sharp skirmish on this occasion between Gladstone and the member for Portsmouth. Sir Henry Wolff had risen to a point of order, and the Prime Minister, impatient of interruption, tried to put him down in an abrupt and high-handed way. It will have been seen that Sir Henry was not the man to allow himself to be ridden over rough-shod or to take an intended snub lying down. ' I refuse,' he cried, ' to be dictated to by the Prime Minister in that way.' Gladstone was the last man to withhold recognition of talent on either side of the House. Like Disraeli, who was always the friend of the new member endeavouring to push his way, he invariably gave generous encouragement where he thought it was merited. The

Fourth Party had many a pitched battle with the Goliath in after days, and very often got the worst of it. But Gladstone always gave evidence of the fact that he admired and respected the most persistent and untiring of his antagonists, although their ingenious methods of paralysing business often drove him to the verge of despair. The energy with which they returned to the attack after a fall was an exhibition of spirit entirely after his own heart, and the first stand made by Sir Henry Wolff left no trace of ill-feeling, but rather gave the initial impetus to the recognition of rising talent that was not to be reckoned with lightly.

When Sir Henry Wolff's resolution was put to the House, and the three future colleagues who had taken an active part in the debate went into the same division lobby—the mover, of course, as one of the tellers—they were joined by the fourth. Mr. A. J. Balfour had not spoken at any stage of the Bradlaugh dispute, and his participation in any of the debates would have excited surprise rather than anything else. Beyond raising a few points in connection with foreign policy, he had not displayed any particular interest in the

proceedings of the stormy session ushered in by the new Parliament. Nobody had the least inkling of the prominent part which he was destined to play in politics, or would, at that time, have credited the suggestion. He was looked upon as a superior young man, genteelly devoid of passionate convictions, inclined rather to be an intellectual 'loafer' than a fighting politician, without ambition or the necessary energy to stimulate it. This was the portrait he suggested to fellow-M.P.s as he reclined on the front Opposition bench below the gangway, his legs characteristically stretched out in front of him, with his eyes half-closed in the serenity of philosophic contemplation, which had even in those early days become a second habit. That behind this detached appearance there was a wide-awake and active mentality became apparent as time went on. But nobody could have guessed in 1880 that Mr. Balfour was a personality who would some day have to be reckoned with, and whose intellectual gifts and unlimited mental resource would dazzle and charm the House of Commons during long years of power and authority. Mr. Balfour was already on terms of friendship with Lord Randolph Churchill, and the impression at the

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time was that he derived a certain amount of languid amusement through watching the unconventional developments of the Bradlaugh campaign, as engineered by the three indefatigable members who were to become his associates. It is evident, from the fact that the member for Hertford never once opened his lips on the subject of Bradlaugh and the Parliamentary oath, that his metaphysical mind was not in the least stirred by the controversy raging around him. He appeared to look upon the whole thing as a storm in a teacup, about something that was of little consequence ; and he might have been frankly bored by the incident, and have stayed away from the debates connected with it, if the rapid evolution of Lord Randolph Churchill and his two coadjutors had not provided a vast amount of food for intellectual entertainment.

So it happened that Mr. Balfour, half in fun and half in earnest, walked into the division lobby in the wake of the others in order to record his vote in favour of Sir Henry Wolff's motion. There are, as everybody knows, two tellers in each lobby to count the votes when a division takes place. By a somewhat curious coincidence Lord Percy, the present Duke of

Northumberland, was nominated to assist the member for Portsmouth as teller on the occasion which brought the future Fourth Party together for the first time. In this way he was led by Fate to act as sponsor to a political combination of which he eventually became, in a struggle against the growing influence of Lord Randolph Churchill, the most active opponent—a story that will be duly narrated in its proper place.

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On another occasion Mr. Gorst, who was always 'bobbing up' at seasonable moments with a disconcerting point that had occurred to nobody else, by which he proved that the Government was acting in a highly unconstitutional manner, exposed a manœuvre of the Prime Minister, the object of which was to obtain by indirect means what could not be accomplished in a direct and legitimate way. The Committee, after repeated sittings, had reported the opinion that Bradlaugh was debarred from taking the oath; but recommended his being permitted to make a solemn affirmation instead at his own risk. This view was rejected by the House by a considerable majority, a resolution being placed on the records by which it was declared that Bradlaugh should not be allowed either to take the oath or to affirm. A few days later Gladstone brought forward a motion to enable any person returned to Parliament, who was legally entitled to affirm in the courts of justice, to make an affirmation at the table of the House instead of taking the usual oath. Mr. Gorst opposed the Prime Minister's resolution on the ground that it was out of order, being nothing more nor less than a motion—already rejected

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Meanwhile the Bradlaugh case had reached an acute stage. The member for Northampton, foiled in his efforts to secure what he wanted by legitimate means, had declared his determination to take the oath whether the House liked it or not. Having vainly pleaded his own cause at the Bar, he refused point-blank to obey the Speaker's order that he should withdraw. When the Sergeant-at-Arms removed him, he rushed back again into the House. He insisted on standing beside the table while the division was in progress by which the House decided to order his withdrawal, and, having persisted in disobeying the Speaker's injunctions to retire, was eventually taken into custody and committed to the Clock Tower. The next day Sir Stafford Northcote proposed his release. The members of the Fourth Party were now sitting together and holding consultations as to the course to be pursued. They felt

dissatisfied with their leader's resolution, and thought it would be an excellent plan for the Opposition actually to express its thanks to the Speaker for his conduct in locking up Bradlaugh on the previous day. Accordingly, Mr. Gorst scribbled an amendment to this effect on a sheet of paper, and passed it along to Sir Stafford Northcote, with a note explaining that he proposed to move it. Sir Stafford, having read the draft, coolly handed it to Sir Henry Holland, the present Lord Knutsford, who thereupon got up and moved the amendment himself, reading it with the most unabashed effrontery from Mr. Gorst's paper. A complaint was naturally addressed afterwards to the leader, who sent back a few lines of apology, in which he said, 'I agree that it was too bad of us to steal your thunder.'

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CHAPTER V

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obvious. It is no personal disgrace to go into Parliament for the object of gaining place and power. There is a wide distinction between the ordinary man, who seeks to win the suffrages of his fellows in order that, for sheer snobbery or for some company-promoting end, he may become a person of better social standing, and the man of talent, who wishes to push his way to the front first in order that he may serve his country after.

But from the standpoint of the national welfare, which is so often a secondary consideration, it is important in the extreme that public life should not be permitted to degenerate into a mere hunting-ground for political adventurers. It must be remembered that men who have to contend against heavy odds to achieve their ambition, do more harm to the country at large, in the course of their upward struggle, than can ever be undone when they have obtained the power and position they covet. Disraeli furnishes a striking case in point. All the best work of his life was directed towards the single object of fighting a great battle to secure the first place. He went into politics with splendid ideals; he formulated great principles; he invented a new and sym-

pathetic policy for the Conservative party. But by the time he reached the zenith of his ambition the great energies which had sustained him in a fight of unexampled fierceness began to give out. His greatest genius had been utilised, through necessity rather than selfishness, to help on his own career.

Nobody who was personally acquainted with Lord Randolph Churchill in the year 1880 could have failed to place him in the category of those to whom political life had a serious meaning. Mr. Winston Churchill, in the unconventional and unaffectedly candid 'Life' of his father, has brought out very clearly the extraordinary independence of mind and generous impulsiveness with which Lord Randolph blurted out his convictions and enthusiasms during the probationary period of his Parliamentary career. The man who, with his father in the position of Lord-Lieutenant, could not refrain, under the very shadow of Blenheim Palace, from hot-blooded speeches about Irish grievances, was not the man to have entered the House of Commons for the mere pleasure of writing M.P. after his name, or because he regarded it as a stepping-stone to material rewards. The period of youth is seldom the

period of calculation. Lord Randolph was only twenty-five years old when he first took his seat as member for Woodstock. During the whole of that Parliament, the greater part of which was spent by him, as has already been stated, in Ireland, his mind was undergoing a process of being humanised. In 1880 he was more generous-natured, more open-hearted, more firmly a democrat in principle than ever before, and certainly a great deal less tolerant of the selfish and exclusive policy of the old Tory party.

It was this youthful enthusiasm that made him gravitate naturally to close political intimacy with Mr. Gorst, who then cherished the illusion that Tory democracy was capable of being revived, notwithstanding the practical retirement from active public life of the only man who had seemed to possess the ability to educate the average Conservative up to such an ideal. Mr. Gorst, as has been shown, had for many years enjoyed the confidence of Disraeli in a special degree. Not only had his reorganisation work brought him into constant touch with the leader of the party, but he had accompanied him on important provincial tours in Lancashire and elsewhere. On these occa-

sions he was greatly impressed by the reality of Disraeli's sympathy with the working classes, and by the keen understanding he displayed of the minutest circumstances of their humble lives. It gave him a genuine insight into his chief's political ideals ; and he could not fail to be struck afterwards by a singular thing. Whatever pledges Disraeli gave to the representatives of the people who brought legitimate grievances before him were duly carried out during the years of office that followed the election of 1874. It is true that the Conservative leader himself was led astray from his great schemes of social regeneration by the allurements of foreign policy ; but at any rate he took care that no promises on his part were broken. Labour questions were dealt with in a Factory Bill, as he had promised the Lancashire operatives in the days of opposition ; and much other useful social legislation was passed during his lease of office. Only one thing was wanting : the measures were carried out with his approval and at his instigation, but he took no part in framing them, and they consequently lacked the broad scope and unity of purpose that he alone was capable of instilling into them.

No one else in the Conservative party appeared to be imbued with Disraeli's generous creed. Nothing could have been more natural or spontaneous, therefore, than the quick understanding that sprang up between the young and enthusiastic member for Woodstock, who had already shown in the most spirited manner how little his soul was confined by class tradition and conventionality, and the experienced lawyer and administrator, whose serious view of the responsibilities of public life coincided so closely with his own. The Bradlaugh episode brought them together; it led each to appreciate the brilliant qualities of the other. But the part they played in the controversy they helped so largely to set in motion was more in the nature of a *jeu d'esprit* than anything else. Both perceived the opportunity it afforded for placing Gladstone's Ministry in a position of great embarrassment. That was, of course, the primary object of the whole series of manœuvres. A consideration of equal importance was the necessity of supplying the Conservative Opposition with the backbone it obviously lacked. The Fourth Party stepped into the breach in order to assist Sir Stafford Northcote in a task for which, in spite of his

enormous ability, he was glaringly unfitted, and not with the intention of usurping his authority. This was shown clearly enough by the fact that at first they always informed him of any steps they proposed to take, even if they did not actually ask his advice. But it must be admitted that his leadership received less recognition as time went on, and he continued unregenerately to remain the passive and weak-kneed opponent of the Liberal Government.

A proof of the fact that the Conservative chief was often, if not invariably, made aware of the intentions of the Fourth Party during the first session of its activity is given in his diary. On July 2 we find the following entry: 'I had some difficulty in restraining Randolph Churchill from putting down an amendment of his own; and I could not prevent Gorst from giving notice that he would raise the point of order on Gladstone's motion, as being an infringement of the rule that matters once settled should not be brought forward again in the same session. He was technically wrong, though he argued his point with great ingenuity, and though in substance his contention was very much the same as

my own.'¹ A little further on we read: 'Soon afterwards the Home Rulers retired to confer, and by-and-by Randolph Churchill came and told me that they had decided that, if the division were taken on Pell's amendment, they should vote with the Government; but if it were taken on the main question, they would walk out.'² It is plain from these extracts that even late in the session of 1880 Sir Stafford Northcote was on occasion receiving active assistance, though little obedience, from the member for Woodstock and his friends; that he was to some extent kept informed as to their intended tactics in the House; and that he was supplied by them with useful information.

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The Bradlaugh episode served its purpose of bringing the four members of the Fourth Party together. They soon perceived the value of acting in harmony and the immensely effective political weapon furnished by such a combination. This led by degrees to their entering into a more definite compact. Their common action was at first purely spontaneous. The next step was one of mutual confidence,

¹ *Life and Letters of Sir Stafford Northcote*, by Andrew Lang, ii. 173.

² *Ibid.* p. 175.

when future intentions were discussed. Out of these talks and confabulations developed the idea of forming amongst themselves a kind of defensive alliance. It was agreed that whenever one of their number should be made the object of attack in the House of Commons, the others should jump up and defend him. No question of leadership was ever raised; each member was to maintain his independence of action, though it was mutually agreed that they should act in concert whenever it was to the common interest. The Fourth Party was, in fact, in its inception a fighting concern. Mr. Balfour may have thrown in his lot with it, in a major degree, because he found the association pleasant and amusing; but the other three belligerent spirits were in earnest from the first, and fully realised the possibilities of such a political compact. The policy on which they were agreed was, as we have seen, the simple one of attacking the Government and urging on their own leaders to take part in the fray. A more serious note was struck when Ministers brought forward their first great measure of social reform, the Employers' Liability Bill. Up to this period of the session the activity of the Fourth Party had displayed

itself in harassing the Government over the constitutional question of the Parliamentary oath, and in inventing ingenious methods of obstructing the voting of Supply. For the first time they were confronted with the necessity of agreeing upon a policy to be pursued in regard to an important Government Bill dealing with a matter of vital interest to the nation.

The joke had now become earnest. It was no longer a question of brilliant guerilla warfare, of bombarding the enemy's stronghold with any weapon to hand. Here was a great political principle involved ; and for the first time Lord Randolph Churchill and Mr. Gorst met on a higher plane of sympathy. Up to that time the latter had looked upon his impetuous colleague as a hot-headed free-lance inspired by flashes of political genius. The mistaken impression was speedily corrected. The apparently irresponsible young nobleman, bent primarily on mischief of any promising description, presented himself in a new and attractive light. Behind all this dare-devilry were real feeling and principle. It was agreed that the Employers' Liability Bill should be criticised in the light of broadening the measure and making it go further than its authors intended.

These tactics would, it was perceived, prove a source of very great embarrassment to a Liberal Government when adopted by a Conservative Opposition. But they would accomplish more than this. The occasion offered an opportunity of leading back the Tory party to the principles it appeared to have abandoned. The crushing defeat of the spring had left the party thoroughly disheartened. The mass of Conservatives blamed Disraeli's policy, the failure of which they thought to be complete. Those who were behind the scenes of party organisation, however, knew that a great factor in bringing about Gladstone's triumph at the polls was the improvement of the electoral machine after the example set by the Tories before their great victory in 1874. But this was not generally realised, and the result of the defeat, after a particularly glorious spell of office, was that the new Conservatism went to the wall, and that the Tory party as a whole took refuge in the antiquated traditions of the past, where it has practically remained ever since.

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The proposed plan offered a splendid chance to the Fourth Party of endeavouring to rescue the Conservatives from the slough into which they had fallen, and at the same

time of creating a novel and effective method of opposition. Lord Randolph Churchill took up the idea with alacrity. It coincided perfectly with the principles he already held. It promised a revival of the Tory democracy that had been killed by the recent elections ; and he was the last person to fail to appreciate the Machiavellian ingenuity of the proposition that they should 'go one better' than the Liberals in the interest of the working classes. Sir Henry Wolff was equally enthusiastic. The light side of it in particular tickled his sense of humour. He already anticipated in imagination the hot August evenings when the legislative zeal of the four colleagues would keep the Committee busy until the small hours of the morning. Mr. Balfour's position was a little more difficult. He had, during the early stages of the Bill, put down an amendment to the second reading in the following terms : 'That, while it is desirable workmen should be placed on the same footing in regard to compensation for accidents as the general public, equality should be sought by altering the general principle on which compensation for accidents is now awarded, rather than by merely abolishing or modifying the existing exceptions to it.' In

a speech supporting this view, delivered in the course of the debate which followed the motion to get the Speaker out of the Chair, Mr. Balfour expressed himself rather in sympathy with the employer than with the employed. The Attorney-General, Sir Henry James, defining the position of the member for Hertford, remarked: 'Instead of increasing the liability of the employer he would diminish it, and would say that employers should not be liable at all unless they had been themselves guilty of some misconduct.' Fortunately, Mr. Balfour's attitude was on that occasion, as on many subsequent ones, sufficiently indefinite to be capable of a variety of constructions. In his characteristic way he had not really quite made up his mind on the merits of the question, being far too genuine a philosopher to take a headlong plunge into either side of a controversy so far removed from metaphysics. There was no insuperable difficulty in the way of his falling in with the Fourth Party plan, which offered, in addition to its strategical soundness, the strongest inducements in the way of intellectual entertainment.

The die was accordingly cast. Whilst two, at least, of the partners were enthusiastic on

the point of policy, all were agreed as to the expediency of the tactics to be adopted. On this occasion the Conservative leaders were not consulted. It was too delicate a matter to broach indiscreetly. If support were derived at all from the Front Opposition bench, it would obviously have to be the result of a process of education, which could be more easily pursued from the seats below the gangway. When, therefore, on a sultry afternoon at the beginning of August, the Committee stage of the Employers' Liability Bill was the first order of the day, the members of the Fourth Party sat expectantly, in their accustomed places, under a new sense of responsibility. They had earned an unrivalled reputation as a guerilla band of political skirmishers. Their attacks on the Government, their impartial castigation of their own leader, the cheerful self-sacrifice with which they engineered all-night sittings—all these things had diverted as well as exasperated the House of Commons. Now they were about to appear in a new rôle, and to hoist the Fourth Party flag, for the first time, as champions of a new Tory democratic movement.

CHAPTER VI

' ASSISTING THE GOVERNMENT.'

A WARNING note had been sounded to the Government on June 3, when the Employers' Liability Bill was read a second time. Mr. Dodson, the President of the Local Government Board, had introduced the Bill without giving any precise outline as to what its provisions would be. It was a blank cheque, which Ministers could fill up afterwards according to expediency. Either the Liberal Cabinet, in their haste to produce some measure of social reform, had had no time to arrive at any settled principles in connection with the subject, or else they thought it safer, where such a thorny matter was concerned, to ascertain the feeling of their supporters and opponents before committing themselves definitely to a particular scheme. This unsatisfactory attitude towards a question of the first importance provoked the member for Chatham, on the

date mentioned above, to utter a number of sarcasms at the expense of the Government. He moved the adjournment of the debate, on the ground that there was nothing but a dummy Bill before the House, and told the Treasury Bench very plainly what he thought about them for shirking their responsibilities in this fashion. In consequence of this conduct on the part of the promoters of the Bill, it was clear that a great deal of hard work lay before the Committee. A measure that had been thrust upon Parliament in the form of a roll of blank parchment, tied round with pink tape, was obviously immature. The Fourth Party took an early opportunity of announcing its intention to plunge into this work of constructive legislation with unflagging zeal, and to render the Government all the assistance in its power to make the Bill as perfect as possible.

At the commencement of the proceedings in Committee it started a hare most successfully by pressing for an exact definition of what the word 'stock,' which occurred in the first clause of the Bill, was intended to cover. This initiated the most fruitful and lengthy discussions, and served to while away a great deal of the Committee's time. Mr. Gorst wanted to

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know if the ill-stacking of a number of bricks or scaffold poles would be ‘a defect in stock’ ; Lord Randolph Churchill inquired whether, in the case of a horse with a diseased foot coming to the ground and injuring a ploughman riding home from work, the farmer would be liable under the Bill ; Mr. Balfour asked if a servant who broke his arm by being thrown from a horse whose knees had been broken through the employer’s carelessness would be entitled to compensation. After an endless wrangle, during which the Attorney-General and the President of the Local Government Board were rather mixed in their arguments and practically contradicted one another, the Fourth Party triumphantly accused the Government of being unable to understand the terms of its own Bill. It also complained very bitterly of having been left in the lurch by the Government. The members of the Fourth Party had been amazed, they declared through their spokesman, in supporting the proposal of Ministers themselves in the last division, to find that they were voting against Her Majesty’s Government. If, therefore, they were again to support a Government Bill, they were afraid they would again find themselves in a minority. They

were very anxious to support the Government upon the Bill, and they wanted to know, if it went to a division, whether the Government would support the President of the Local Government Board, or whether they would throw him over and vote against his Bill.

An hour or so later the Committee was still occupied in wrangling over the definition of 'stock' and 'stock-in-trade.' Mr. Dodson vainly declared that he had no desire to retain the word 'stock' in the Bill, and endeavoured to point out to his critics on both sides of the House that horses were included under the word 'plant.' The speech promptly brought a member of the little group on the Opposition side below the gangway to his feet, who evoked a great deal of ironical cheering by the remark that he extremely regretted that more rapid progress was not being made with the measure, but that it was impossible to proceed rapidly with the consideration of a Bill which the Government themselves, though they had introduced it, did not understand. Not in the least daunted by the protesting shouts that rose from the benches opposite, he went on to say that he and his friends were, therefore, determined to do all that lay in their power to make

this and other Government measures as perfect specimens of legislation as possible. They need not hurry with the work of improving these Bills, because there was no particular pressure of time ; they knew—they had been told often enough—that the House was to sit until November, and, that being so, they were under no pressure of time, and there was no reason why the Government should exhibit symptoms of impatience. He had just said that the Government did not understand their own Bill, and that remark had been questioned. But the proof of the fact was to be found in the reply which had just been given by the President of the Local Government Board, who was in charge of the Bill, and by the way in which he had acted in regard to this particular phrase ‘stock.’ The speech was continued for some length in this vein, and when the speaker sat down another member of the Fourth Party jumped up to protest against any more time being wasted over a discussion that led to no result. They had done their best, he declared, regarding his colleagues with a smile of approval, to elicit information from the Government, and the only result had been to bring out the extraordinary definition with which the President of

the Local Government Board had recently favoured them. That being so, he thought the best thing they could do would be to take a division at once.

This, with a motion to report progress, which was gladly accepted by the Government, ended the first day's proceedings in Committee. The Fourth Party had maintained its reputation for enlivening the discussions in the House in a highly creditable manner. At the same time a vein of seriousness underlay the chaff to which the authors of the Bill had been so mercilessly subjected. It was resolved to emphasise this fact on the following day, which, although a Wednesday, was at this period of the session by custom given up to the consideration of Government business. Accordingly, at an early hour of the afternoon, Lord Randolph Churchill, having caught the Speaker's eye, rose to make an important exposition of Fourth Party policy. He said that after considerable reflection, and after studying to the best of his ability the mass of literature with which the House had been flooded since this question had come before it, he had arrived at the conclusion that the doctrine of common employment was disastrous in its effects alike to employer and employed

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and so monstrously unjust from the anomalies which arose under it that it was productive of unmitigated evil. He wished to ask the Government whether they did not desire, as everybody else desired, to arrive at some final settlement of this question ; whether they had any hope that this Bill, in its present shape, could be a final settlement of the question. Supposing the measure passed in its present form, as soon as its limited character had been ascertained by a few accidents having taken place and a few actions having been tried, the workmen would find that they had not got what they thought they would get, and that discovery would be followed by a fresh agitation, conducted with all the energy and enterprise which had marked the present one. It must be remembered also that the prospect of new legislation, or the apprehension of new legislation, worked a most damaging and disastrous effect on the trades and employments affected.

The Fourth Party had agreed to oppose the Employers' Liability Bill on the ground that it did not go far enough. Lord Randolph now proceeded to 'let the cat out of the bag' in a very pronounced and unmistakable manner.

If the Government, he exclaimed, would eliminate from their measure this doctrine of common employment they would, in all probability, arrive at a final settlement of the matter. The present state of things was analogous in some respects to what the country experienced at the time of the Reform Bill of 1866. The question then was whether they should have a £5, a £6, or a £7 franchise ; and as long as there was any doubt or dispute as to which figure should qualify for the franchise, it was perfectly evident that there would be no rest from the Reform agitation. The matter was only finally settled by at once going to the bottom of the scale. In the same way, if the Government would cut out this doctrine of common employment altogether, and make employers liable for all accidents of every kind which might occur, they would arrive at a solid basis on which their legislation might finally rest.

The consternation of the front Opposition bench, as of all the serried ranks of orthodox Tories behind the speaker, can better be imagined than described. Disraeli's objectionable creed, which they believed had cost them so dearly at the polls, was thought to

have been decently consigned to oblivion. Yet here it was coming back to them in a still more frightful shape, bringing with it seven more devils a thousand times worse than itself. The Conservative leaders listened in horror as the member for Woodstock, nothing daunted, proceeded to go on with his thrilling exposition of Tory democracy. What was the use, he asked, of taking up so much time in considering this Bill, sitting late into the autumn, and detaining everybody from the various occupations which devolved upon them at that season, if they were not to make a settlement in this matter? Would Mr. Dodson, knowing, as he did, the views of large bodies of employees, say that he believed this Bill would be a final settlement? He should be very much surprised to hear that. It was evident there were a very large number of accidents for which the Bill would not provide at all.

After further argument in the same strain, Lord Randolph sat down. If he had frightened his own side, he had certainly succeeded in firing a bombshell into the Government. The official Liberals on the Front Bench were paralysed by the unexpectedness and audacity of the attack. The President of the Local

Government Board was compelled to reply ; but his speech betrayed a hesitation so obvious as to be made the subject of comment by speakers who followed him in debate. Still more pitiable was the plight of the Conservative leaders, who took the only course left open to them. They could not repudiate men on their side whose tactics were causing the most obvious discomfiture to the Government ; whilst, on the other hand, the employer class expected them to look after its interests as sharply as might be judicious in the face of strong popular agitation in favour of the Bill. So they took refuge in decorous silence ; and when it became necessary for a Front Bench man to intervene in the debate, he carefully abstained from making any allusion to the member for Woodstock or his knot of partisans below the gangway.

This Wednesday afternoon was a great day for the Fourth Party. Whilst the effect of Lord Randolph Churchill's unblushing declaration of democracy still dominated the House, Mr. Balfour rose to give an adroit turn to his own views. A member, he said, had spoken of the Bill proposed by the Government as being a moderate and reasonable one, and

a settlement of the question. That the Bill was a moderate one he would not deny, but that it was reasonable or a settlement of the question he did most emphatically deny. It was by no means a settlement of the question. The Government in bringing it in were influenced by two motives, two principles of action that could not be reconciled. They wished, at the same time, to bring in a Bill that would satisfy both the employers of labour and the workmen of this country. They had, no doubt, failed with regard to employers ; and nobody, he believed, who understood the position of the workmen in regard to the matter could say but that they had failed also with them. Mr. Balfour then referred to his former speech on the motion that the Speaker do leave the Chair, and said that he had ventured to suggest a method by which the inequality between the workmen and the public might be done away with. That suggestion did not meet with favour from any part of the House. He was described as a visionary philosopher, and it was said that the suggestion, theoretically excellent though it might be, could not be carried out in practice. If they altered the law at all, he concluded, and changed it from

the condition in which it had stood for the last thirty or forty years, let them, at all events, alter it in such a manner that no further alteration might be demanded of the influential classes of the community.

This speech was certainly good in its way, although there was a tone of reservation about it which suggested to the speaker's colleagues that Mr. Balfour had not yet fully imbibed the democratic principles which were to be the guiding star of the Fourth Party. After a brief interval, therefore, Mr. Gorst endeavoured to strengthen the impression that had first been made upon the House by Lord Randolph Churchill's unorthodox speech. A Liberal member had expressed his regret that Sir Richard Cross was not in his place, and that other members of the late Government were not present. It was all very well for them to abdicate their functions and leave them in the hands of the Fourth Party on ordinary occasions, but in a matter of such extreme importance and delicacy as that one, he would venture to say that the Committee was entitled to have the presence of the late Home Secretary in those difficult deliberations. He had great respect for gentlemen below the gangway, but

he thought they were not to be congratulated on the course they were then taking. They seemed to be desirous of putting the Government to some little embarrassment by supporting the amendment.

An attack on the Fourth Party always ensured reprisals, and Mr. Gorst was not slow to take up the cudgels. Gentlemen upon the other side of the House were so exceedingly charitable, he retorted, and so extremely liberal in their views of members upon this side! But, notwithstanding what had been said by members on the other side, they would certainly continue to render their assistance to Her Majesty's Government in the passing of this Bill. Loud laughter naturally greeted this announcement. It was a jest very much after the heart of the House of Commons, where humour of a certain quality is better appreciated than in any other assembly in the world. He should not be surprised, the member for Chatham went on, if the Government regarded anything he said on this clause with some amount of suspicion, not because he was a Conservative, but because he had before in that House expressed his opinion that nothing would solve the difficulties of this question but

the abolition of the doctrine of common employment. Because he had expressed an opinion of that kind, he had no doubt that the Attorney-General would receive any suggestions of his with extreme caution and mistrust. But he had endeavoured, in assisting the Government in passing the clauses of the Bill, to put himself into the position of a person who was not willing to abolish the doctrine of common employment and to make the Bill as equitable as it could be made. Would it not, he concluded, addressing the capitalists in the House, be better for them to join the Government in making this Bill one which would secure a substantial settlement of the question, which would allay agitation and settle the question for some years, and give the Government the credit, which he did not grudge them, of having passed a substantial measure?

These prolonged discussions on the Employers' Liability Bill in Committee naturally added to the general muddle in which the Government found itself in regard to public business. Ministers still had a substantial legislative programme in front of them, and in order to stem the rising tide they proposed a Saturday sitting. The members of the Fourth

Party were greatly indignant at the suggestion, opposing it on the ground that after the arduous work of the week it was impossible for the House to deal with the legislation in a manner in which it ought to be dealt with. If the Government, they said, were determined to pass all the measures on the paper—and they expressed the hope that they were determined to pass them—they must make up their minds to a protracted session and to take the Bills in fair course. They were themselves ready to sit till the end of September, if necessary, and they did not wish to hurry through the business in an improper manner. The next thing about which their minds were exercised was the exclusion, amongst other persons, of domestic servants from the scope of the Bill. Why should they be excluded? they asked; and Mr. Balfour, whose attitude had often been one of half-hearted compromise, astonished the Committee by actually moving an amendment the object of which was to give domestic servants the benefits of the Bill—a proposal that was negatived by an overwhelming majority. All kinds of hypothetical cases were put, in order to show the hardship of excluding this deserving class. There was the case of

an employer coming home late at night, and when he did not, perhaps, altogether know what he was doing, blowing out the gas. An explosion might result in such circumstances and the servant receive serious injury. Was he not to receive compensation in a case of that kind? Or, again, a servant at the Charing Cross Hotel might be injured by a defect in the lift, caused by the negligence of the manager, and it would be very hard that he could not obtain redress. The Committee at this point began to suspect the seriousness of the lecture, and loud cries of 'Divide, divide!' were uttered in protest; but the Fourth Party pointed out to them that the welfare of domestic servants was an important matter, though the Government evidently considered the subject beneath their notice. That was simply because domestic servants, generally speaking, had no votes. It had often been observed that those classes of the community who were not electorally powerful had great difficulty in getting their wants listened to in the House of Commons.

When the Bill had passed through its Committee stage, Lord Randolph and his friends had the satisfaction of knowing that

their efforts had not been wasted. They had succeeded in getting a number of alterations made in the original draft of the measure ; and it is a fact to be noted that many of their proposals, which were rejected by the Government in 1880, have since found their way into the Statute-book. Nevertheless, they were far from satisfied with the concessions obtained, and, when the Bill as amended was considered by the House, the Fourth Party moved the insertion of an insurance clause, which had for its object the encouraging of employers and employed to combine together to secure, by way of a mutual fund, an easy and just means of providing compensation for injuries sustained by workmen in the course of their work, which would, it was contended, have the effect of drawing masters and workmen more closely together. The Government refused to accept the clause, and, although the proposal received some influential support in the House, it was rejected by a large majority when submitted to the test of a division.

The attitude of the members of the Fourth Party towards the Employers' Liability Bill may be summed up in their own words when, on the third reading, they moved an amendment

proposing its re-committal. Those members with whom he generally acted, said their spokesman, took a very independent view of the Bill; they did not represent any particular class or interest, but were contending for even-handed justice. Had Disraeli been leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons in the place of Sir Stafford Northcote, it may be safely asserted that he would have adopted the same line of policy. It will be seen presently that he watched the proceedings of this independent group not only with interest, but with sympathy. They were, after all, seconding and reviving the efforts in the direction of social reform which he had so consistently advocated in the best days of his statesmanship.

CHAPTER VII

THE ATTACK ON THE LEADER

SERIOUSNESS of purpose, it must be admitted, did not invariably inspire the conduct of the Fourth Party. Its tactics were often conceived amid scenes of levity. As soon as the four allies were half-way through the session, and were on terms of friendly intimacy, they instituted little dinners at which they might meet and discuss the plan of operations for the immediate future. Lord Randolph Churchill entertained his friends at his house in St. James's Place—which, oddly enough, was next door to Sir Stafford Northcote's—and at week-ends at Blenheim Palace; Mr. Gorst invited them to Wandsworth Common, where politics alternated with lawn tennis; Sir Henry Wolff and Mr. Balfour gave dinners at the Garrick. These meetings took place as often as two or three times in a week, and from the end of July in the first session of

their combined activity were continued with more or less regularity. They were usually quite private ; but on occasions a little dinner party was arranged and one or two guests invited. At one of these sociable dinners in the month of August, when the work of the session was particularly arduous, a prominent member of the Liberal Government was present. Over their port, the four hosts began to chaff their guest about his prolonged absence from the House unpaired. This drew from him the admission that, on his requesting permission to go and dine with the Fourth Party, the Whips had told him that so long as he kept 'those four fellows' away he could stay any length of time he pleased. It was, doubtless, amid the popping of champagne corks that the little trap was laid for certain Ministers, who used to escape divisions by walking out behind the Speaker's chair after the question had been put a second time, and retiring to a private room until it was all over.

This offered the Fourth Party an unrivalled opportunity for playing out a dignified farce, to the embarrassment and annoyance of the Treasury Bench. It only remained to await the convenient opportunity. When it came,

an angry scene was carefully and methodically staged. The question of raising a memorial in Westminster Abbey to the Prince Imperial, who had been killed at the Cape, was brought before the House. The proposal was opposed by Mr. Briggs, a Liberal, who pointed his objection by asking: 'Why should not a memorial be raised to some great and glorious Englishman?'—a suggestion that provoked loud shouts of 'Briggs, Briggs!' Being placed in a position of embarrassment, members of the Government avoided the division by withdrawing to their fastness whilst the House was filing into the Aye and No lobbies.

On the return of the tellers one of the conspirators drew the Speaker's attention to the fact that members of Her Majesty's Government had been guilty of a gross breach of the rules. The accusation was promptly supported by another of their number, who asked if it were in the power of any member, after the question had been put, to withdraw into a private room behind the Chair. The inquiry was made with a perfect air of innocence, and ended with the remark that, if this were the case, the inquirer would have

been glad to avail himself of the opportunity. The Government was highly indignant at being made the object of this solemn and dramatic indictment. A heated discussion followed, which resulted in the Fourth Party being allowed to move that 'this House do resolve itself into Committee of Supply this day three months,' in order to call the attention of the House to the conduct of Ministers.

SIR H. DRUMMOND WOLFF (after repeated interruptions and risings to order, put down by the Speaker): I am very sorry I should offend the right hon. and learned gentleman opposite (the Home Secretary). I cannot help that; I must bear up against it. I am especially sorry at all to interfere with the equanimity of the Home Secretary (Sir William Harcourt). He occupies a very high position in this House—in the estimation of this House—but he occupies a far higher position in his own estimation. [*Cries of 'Oh, oh!' and 'Withdraw!'*] If hon. gentlemen opposite—[*Renewed cries of 'Withdraw!' 'Order!' 'Chair!' 'Oh, oh!'*] Will hon. gentlemen—[*Cries again renewed, coupled with loud cries of 'Order!'*]

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MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Portsmouth is in possession of the House. [*Renewed cries of 'Withdraw!'*]

SIR H. DRUMMOND WOLFF: If hon. gentlemen opposite wish me to withdraw the expression I made use of, I will withdraw it, and I will say that the right hon. and learned gentleman does not occupy a high position in his own estimation. What I want to bring before the House, and before you, Sir, is this. I maintain, and many of my hon. friends will bear me out, that after the question had been put a second time, and after the door in the lobby had been closed by the Sergeant-at-Arms, many of the right hon. and hon. gentlemen on the Treasury Bench went out of the House and betook themselves to a room which, I believe, belongs to them behind the Chair. Now, Sir, it is held that if hon. members have heard a question put a second time they are bound to give a vote on the subject. On that point there is no doubt. I therefore, Sir, would ask you whether it would be competent for me on Monday to move for a Committee to inquire into the question of order, because it seems to me to be a very dangerous precedent if hon. gentlemen who have the privilege of a

room behind the Chair are enabled, after a question has been put a second time, to take refuge there, whereas ordinary members of this House have not that privilege. It is on that ground that I beg to move the adjournment of the House, not with any desire of defeating or obstructing business, but simply, Sir, with the view of asking you how far I may call your attention to this subject, which appears to me to be a very important one indeed.

SIR WILLIAM HARCOURT: The hon. member for Portsmouth has made a discovery—he often makes discoveries; his discoveries are all of the same character as the present. He has discovered a mare's nest.

MR. COURTNEY: I rise to order. I beg to ask you, Sir, whether the question ought not to be put to the House.

MR. SPEAKER: At present the motion has not been seconded.

MR. ONSLOW: Sir, in rising to second the motion, I shall not detain the House very long. . . . I distinctly assert that hon. and right hon. gentlemen on those benches, after you, Sir, had put the question a second time from the Chair, walked out of the House to a place which ordinary members like myself and my hon.

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friend the member for Portsmouth have not access to.

MR. SPEAKER : Before I put the question to the House it would be right that I should state what the rule of the House is. That rule is very plain. It is, that after a question has been put a second time members present are bound to vote. The matter all turns on a question of fact. The question is that this House do now adjourn.

SIR WILLIAM HARCOURT : Sir, I suppose I may be allowed to state the fact. Persons are supposed to have a knowledge of what they have done themselves. I, and every one of my friends round me, walked out of the House before the question was put a second time. [' No, no ! '] What do hon. gentlemen opposite mean ? Do they mean to say that we do not know whether we did do that, or that, knowing the facts to be opposite, we state that which is untrue ? The fact is plain and obvious. The outer door was not locked. The hon. member for Portsmouth is entirely wrong. Not one of us was in the room to which he refers. We passed through the door behind the Speaker before the question was put a second time, and that door had not been

locked. The whole thing is an absolute mare's nest.

SIR STAFFORD NORTHCOTE : I think there is some confusion here, as there was a very large number of members in the House when the question was put a second time. I can bear my testimony to what was a fact. I was sitting at the farther end of this bench when I saw several of the right hon. gentlemen go out. I did not think that was quite the course I should like to adopt, and, therefore, I came to the place where I usually sit, and, after I had taken my seat, the question was put a second time.

MR. SHERIDAN : I only rise to say, Sir, what has already been said—that I saw hon. and right hon. gentlemen on the Front Bench go out before you put the question a second time.

SIR H. DRUMMOND WOLFF (after brief consultation with the rest of the Fourth Party): I beg, Sir, to withdraw the motion.

When Parliament was on the eve of dissolution in March, Lord Beaconsfield's final act had been to address a letter to the Duke of Marlborough expressing the gravest misgivings about the state of Ireland. With

prophetic instinct he anticipated in this document, as was brought prominently to mind a few years later, the possibility of an English political party allying itself with the Nationalists, who were openly aiming at the severance of the Union. 'It is to be hoped,' he wrote, 'that all men of light and leading will resist this destructive doctrine. The strength of this nation depends on the unity of feeling which should pervade the United Kingdom and its widespread dependencies. The first duty of an English Minister should be to consolidate that co-operation which renders irresistible a community educated, as our own, in an equal love of liberty and law. And yet there are some who challenge the expediency of the Imperial character of this realm. Having attempted, and failed, to enfeeble our Colonies by their policy of decomposition, they may, perhaps, now recognise in the disintegration of the United Kingdom a mode which will not only accomplish, but precipitate, their purpose.' The main effect of publishing this manifesto was, of course, to determine every Irish Home Ruler in Great Britain to vote for the Liberals. It has never been suggested that the elections were generally decided on this issue. The

average elector presumably acted on the usual principle of giving the other party a turn at office ; whilst, as has already been remarked, the perfected organisation set up by the Liberals as an improvement on the newly invented machinery of their opponents worked wonders in the constituencies all over the kingdom.

It may be taken as a general rule that a new Government, on succeeding to office, adopts much the same programme as its predecessor. A ready-made Budget is found at the Treasury ; the continuity of foreign policy is respected ; and the stereotyped pledges as to various social reforms are broken. In the case of Gladstone's Ministry in 1880, however, the Irish policy of the Beaconsfield Government was immediately reversed. It had certainly to face an awkward situation. The distress of the Irish masses during the preceding winter, owing to the great failure of the crops, was very acute, and had culminated in open violence. Michael Davitt had organised the Land League ; and Parnell, whose political power had been growing by leaps and bounds, had thrown the whole force of his inspiring personality into the movement. The Cabinet began at once to make concessions to the

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Nationalists. It was announced in the Speech from the Throne that the Peace Preservation Act, about to expire in June, would not be renewed, but that reliance would be placed for the maintenance of order upon the provisions of the ordinary law. At the beginning of the session the Nationalist party in the House of Commons brought in a Bill to compensate evicted tenants. Gladstone took up the idea, and in June the Government introduced a Compensation for Disturbance Bill on similar lines. This measure by no means received the unanimous support of the Irish or the Liberals in the House of Commons, and it was obviously predestined to rouse powerful opposition in the Lords. The Government displayed remarkable weakness by taking up a great deal of the limited time at their disposal in passing it, and finally throwing it overboard altogether, instead of making a firm stand, when the Lords rejected it, after two days' discussion, by an enormous majority.

The Fourth Party, as may be supposed, took a leading part in opposing this Bill. Lord Randolph Churchill's intimate acquaintance with Irish questions made him a prominent and formidable opponent. During the

progress of the measure through Committee the four colleagues were particularly active in criticising, amending, and bringing forward motions for adjournment. On one of these occasions the Fourth Party had a brush with Sir Stafford Northcote, from which it may be seen that, only half-way through the session, its dissatisfaction with the latter's nominal leadership was almost openly expressed. Gladstone had suddenly changed his mind on a point of some importance, and had sprung an amendment upon the Committee which took them completely by surprise. At a Friday sitting, the Prime Minister intimated the intention of the Government to propose a new amendment to Clause 1, drafted by the Attorney-General for Ireland. On being questioned by the Fourth Party if any modification or alteration of the clause were intended, the Prime Minister was understood to intimate that the clause was to remain unaltered. The following Monday, however, he went down to the House and gave formal notice not only of the Government amendment, but of the complete withdrawal of the clause itself.

Lord Randolph and his friends, upon this, decided to take the unusual course of moving,

directly the House went into Committee on the Bill, 'that the Chairman do now report progress, and ask leave to sit again.' They made a vigorous attack on the Government, pointing out that it was trying to sit upon two stools : to conciliate the Irish party and, at the same time, to avoid alienating the support of moderate Liberals. To effect this object, they said, it had had recourse to all kinds of tricks and artifices which were perfectly unfair to the House and perfectly unworthy of the Ministry. What they particularly complained of was that this amendment, which was clearly an important one, seeing that the Prime Minister had taken charge of it, was left hanging over the heads of the Committee unexplained. Mr. Forster, in reply, denied that there was any change of front on the part of the Government, and declared that the amendment was merely a means of elucidating the meaning of the Attorney-General's clause. The weak spots in this argument were quickly pounced upon by the Fourth Party, which put up another of its members to demolish the Chief Secretary. It was insisted that the new amendment constituted a complete change of front, introduced for the purpose of satisfying the Irish, and that, as the

character of the Bill had been materially altered, the Committee was entitled to an explanation.

These home thrusts told excellently. The free-lance party had succeeded in stirring up quite a promising debate. It had led the way, and it only remained for the Opposition to take up the cue, bring additional pressure to bear on the Government, and make things generally disagreeable for the Front Bench in their dilemma. The Compensation Bill, it was quite evident, had landed them in considerable difficulty. If the Opposition had followed suit and acted with vigour, the advantage might have been pushed home. Sir Stafford Northcote rose, however, with a different purpose in view. He began at once to throw oil on the troubled waters, accepted the wishes and convenience of the Government as the paramount consideration, and begged the Fourth Party to withdraw its motion. An appeal of this kind could not, of course, be disregarded. But it was resented very much, and the fact was made plain when, in response to it, the motion was reluctantly withdrawn. The same sort of thing occurred during the proceedings in Committee on the day following. Mr. MacIver was three times ruled out of

order by the Chairman for discussing the subject of emigration. On the third occasion the Chairman, although Mr. MacIver was still in possession of the Committee, called on Mr. Parnell, who had risen at the same time as the member then speaking. The Fourth Party promptly challenged this procedure, and moved to report progress in order that the Speaker's opinion might be ascertained. A long and fruitful discussion ensued, at the conclusion of which the motion was withdrawn on the Chairman expressing his intention to consult with the Speaker forthwith. The point raised was no mare's nest, and the Fourth Party's contention was eventually upheld by the Speaker. But Sir Stafford Northcote, who had a genius for cutting the ground from under the feet of any Opposition tactics, had meanwhile intervened early in the debate, and had thrown his whole weight into the scale of supporting the original ruling of the Chairman.

The failure of the Conservative leader to back up the energetic onslaughts of the Fourth Party was naturally exasperating, especially when this negative attitude of non-support was turned into positive obstruction of its plans. It was bad enough when the objective was

merely a desire to hamper the Government in the most effective way ; but it became doubly annoying in cases where the brilliant little group below the gangway had secured an advantage on a really solid basis. As the session progressed, this state of affairs grew intolerable. In all stages of passing Bills, in Committee of Supply, at question-time, whenever and wherever the opportunity presented itself, the Fourth Party was bringing in amendments, proposing motions for adjournment, interrogating the Government, and otherwise performing in a very exemplary way the duties of opposition. And Sir Stafford Northcote was always to hand, smoothing away the difficulties of the Ministry, thwarting legitimate and illegitimate motions to report progress, making personal appeals to the active members of his party to desist from pressing their advantages, and 'spoiling sport in every conceivable way. From consulting their leader and informing him of their plans they gradually passed almost into open revolt. Pretence was abandoned, and the independence of the four colleagues became more marked day by day.

Finally, the situation reached the critical point where things could no longer be permitted

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to go on in this indefinite fashion. Lord Randolph Churchill and his friends decided to take a more pronounced course, and to state openly their dissatisfaction at the lack of energy and foresight displayed by Sir Stafford Northcote as leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons. The opportunity came when, within a couple of weeks of the prorogation of Parliament, a meeting of the Conservative party was convened at the Carlton Club on August 20th. On the evening before this political gathering Sir Henry Wolff dined his colleagues at the Garrick. There they proceeded to lay their heads together and to draw up a careful indictment against the leader. It was arranged that Mr. Balfour should be the person to deliver the attack, which had been prepared in such an ingenious way that their dissatisfaction with Sir Stafford was plainly expressed without his name being mentioned at all. The programme was successfully carried out next day. The meeting at the Carlton was, of course, perfectly private. History does not record its proceedings ; but Mr. Balfour faithfully carried out his mission, and made an excellent speech in the terms that had been preconcerted on the evening before.

The Fourth Party was well satisfied with

the result. Without the introduction of any offensive personalities, or the use of any hurtful language, the weakness of the leader had been fully exposed in a merciless fashion. The bulk of the party had naturally listened to the attack with impatience ; but at least some measure of support had been gained from the meeting. A twofold object had, therefore, been achieved. In the first place, the four colleagues had made their position perfectly plain. They had stepped into the breach during the session, not for the purpose of harassing and impeding Sir Stafford Northcote in the discharge of his duties as their nominal leader, but in order to supply an Opposition that did not appear to exist without them. Their object was not the weakening of their chief's authority, but the rescue of the party from the danger of sinking into a disorganised and beaten minority, resigned to its fate and lacking the backbone to attack its successful rivals. Secondly, they had shown the party in general that others besides themselves recognised the existence of the evil.

CHAPTER VIII

A FLOURISH OF TRUMPETS

By the middle of August the Government business was in an absolute muddle. Ministers had long seen that their legislative programme was far too ambitious for the time at their disposal. They had not, of course, counted upon the great energy displayed by a certain section of their political opponents, but had anticipated that with the help of Sir Stafford Northcote's benign influence on the Opposition benches the work of the session would flow on uninterruptedly. It had not taken them many weeks to perceive their mistake; but meanwhile they had committed themselves to an ambitious scheme of legislation, from which they felt unable to withdraw with credit. They had introduced an Employers' Liability Bill, a Compensation for Disturbance Bill, a Hares and Rabbits Bill, a Burials Bill, and several other measures. The session was only com-

menced in May, and at the very outset the Government had encountered the bad luck of the Bradlaugh incident. It had come into office full of confident hope and backed by a large majority; but everything had turned against it. Its effort at Irish legislation had been grossly mismanaged; the Employers' Liability Bill produced unexpected embarrassments; and the ordinary financial business, thanks to the patriotic activity of the Fourth Party, had been prolonged beyond the most dismal estimate. In assisting Committees of the House to vote Supply the Fourth Party was, in fact, absolutely unselfish in the public service. Its members would cheerfully sit up until three in the morning sooner than neglect to initiate the most searching inquiry into each item of national expenditure. Every sixpence was subjected to scrutiny. The Minister in charge of the vote was kept busy half through the night replying to conundrums propounded by them. They were inquisitive about everything, from the construction of battleships to the weather forecasts issued by the Meteorological Office. Then, after several hours employed in this earnest criticism, a motion to report progress would be proposed, on the ground

that exhausted legislators could not be expected to serve the public interest in an efficient manner.

From the Opposition point of view the business of Parliament had been disgracefully mismanaged. The Government, having thrust immature and half-considered measures on the House of Commons, had only itself to blame for the amount of time necessarily expended in moulding them into tolerable shape. The work of the session was so congested by the third week in August that, instead of being on the eve of proroguing Parliament, an undigested mass of legislation still awaited completion. The details of the Burials Bill, a measure that was exciting a great deal of interest in the House and in the country, had yet to be considered; the discussion on the Indian Budget had been left unfinished; Supply itself was not yet over, in connection with which important questions relating to South Africa and to Irish affairs were certain to be raised; and even the Committee stage of the Hares and Rabbits Bill was likely to take up another evening. It was resolved, accordingly, by the Fourth Party to make good use of an opportunity that the official leader was certain

to let slip by. The chance would occur on August 20, on the motion to get the Speaker out of the Chair when going into Committee of Supply. This was the day on which the Carlton Club meeting was held, when it had been arranged for Mr. Balfour to attack Sir Stafford Northcote's leadership. At Sir Henry Wolff's dinner on the preceding evening, therefore, a double indictment was drawn up: one against the conduct of the Opposition, and the other against the incompetence of the Government. Mr. Balfour was also entrusted with the duty of bringing forward the latter in the House of Commons. The amendment was drafted by the combined wisdom of the four allies in the following terms: 'That it is inexpedient, in the interest of public business, that important measures should be brought under the consideration of the House at a period of the session at which it is impossible that they should receive adequate discussion.'

The indictment had been carefully drawn up by the Fourth Party. It contained the most complete exposition of the hopeless mess into which the Government had gradually drifted. Ministers were even accused of wasting time over the Bradlaugh incident, and the

whole Opposition cheered the statement that this was largely owing to the manner in which the Government itself conducted the question. The procedure of Ministers in respect to the Compensation for Disturbance Bill was next impugned. If ever a Government dug a pit for itself to fall into, it was that Bill, declared Mr. Balfour in the course of a long and effective speech. The Ministry must have known the opposition they would meet with in the House of Commons, and the fate the Bill was certain to encounter in the Lords. The Fourth Party wisely anticipated that the answer to its elaborate indictment would be a direct charge of obstruction. Its members had, therefore, decided to adopt the bold course of carrying the war straight into the enemy's camp by roundly accusing Liberal, and particularly Irish, members of having unduly obstructed legislation. To this Lord Hartington replied by reading out, with much solemnity, a statistical inventory of the speeches delivered and the questions asked by the Fourth Party during the session. Mr. Gorst headed the list with 105 speeches and 18 questions; next came Sir Henry Wolff with 68 speeches and 34 questions; whilst Lord

Randolph Churchill had spoken 74 times and asked 21 questions.

Lord Randolph Churchill had prepared himself for the occasion by bringing to the House a copy of an essay, written by Gladstone in the preceding year, on the subject of obstruction. Rising to reply to Lord Hartington, he produced this document and gravely read aloud to the House some of the most telling passages. 'The public,' Gladstone had written, 'has lately heard much on the subject of obstruction in the House of Commons. . . . But to prolong debate, even by persistent iteration, on legislative measures is not necessarily an outrage, an offence, or even an indiscretion. For in some cases it is only by the use of this instrument that a small minority with strong views can draw adequate attention to those views. . . . There are abundant instances in which obstruction of this kind has led to the removal of perilous or objectionable matter from legislative measures, and thus to the avoidance of great public evils.' At this point Lord Randolph grew particularly impressive. 'Now, if a great party may obstruct,' he read on, to the delight of his nearest neighbours, 'it is hazardous to award narrower limits to a small one ; for it is

precisely in the class of cases where the party is small and the conviction strong that the best instances of warrantable obstruction may be found. . . . The House of Commons is, and it may be hoped ever will continue to be, above and beyond all things, a free assembly. If so it must be content to pay the price of freedom. . . . Nothing can be worse than the impotent display of the spirit of coercion, or the attempt to repress offences, which require to be proved in argument, by obstreperous disorder, which is an offence *ipso facto*.'

These passages, declared Lord Randolph, would be the charter of himself and his friends ; and, acting as they did, within the limits laid down by the Prime Minister, and under the sanction of his great Parliamentary experience, he thought they ought to have escaped the censure of Lord Hartington. 'Mr. Balfour,' said the 'Daily News' next morning, 'is one of the small group of energetic and vigilant Conservative gentlemen who, now that a Liberal Government is in office, have made the business of the House their particular province. Mr. Balfour is not, indeed, one of the more demonstrative members of the little party to which he belongs. He is hardly qualified to be

a Danton, or even a Camille Desmoulins of a Tory Mountain. He is, perhaps, cast rather in the gentler mould of a half-poetic Barnave or a semi-philosophical André Chénier. He is not so severely practical as Mr. Gorst. He is not so persistently controversial as Sir Henry Wolff. He is not by any means so irritating in his activity as Lord Randolph Churchill. But he ranks as an honoured member of the disinterested group of Conservatives who make it just now their particular object to "facilitate," as they call it, the public business of the House by means of speeches, motions, notices, questions, complaints, appeals to order, motions to report progress, motions for the adjournment of the debate, motions that "the chairman do now leave the chair," and various other propositions which, to the ordinary and vulgar mind, might seem to portend interruption rather than advancement of the objects of Parliament. The plain meaning of the resolution,' the 'Daily News' concluded, 'was that a Liberal Government ought not to be allowed to pass without obstruction any measures at any time which might render them popular with the country, and which are, therefore, unacceptable to the little group of men

amongst whom Mr. Balfour is not the leading figure.'

There was one brilliant piece of strategy exercised by the Fourth Party which in particular exasperated the Liberals, but which they were powerless to frustrate. Amongst his many wonderful qualities Gladstone possessed an amiable weakness. He loved expounding obscure points or clearing up abstruse questions for the benefit of an inquiring mind. The members of the Fourth Party were not slow to take advantage of this characteristic, and played in the most profitable way on the Prime Minister's good-natured verbosity. Their method of procedure was extremely simple. Lord Randolph Churchill would, in his most insinuating manner, request Gladstone to explain the meaning of some clause or ambiguous phrase to the House. After a lengthy explanation on the part of the Prime Minister, Mr. Gorst would rise in his place and thank him for the lucid exposition, all of which had been perfectly clear to him with the exception of one particular point, on which he begged for further enlightenment. This would generally start the leader of the House on a second lecture, possibly longer than the first. Meanwhile Sir

Henry Wolff was watching his opportunity. At the first sign of peroration he was ready to launch the next riddle. By this time every occupant of the Treasury Bench had seen through the game and was racking his brains in vain for some means of circumventing it. Once, it is recorded, Sir William Harcourt lost patience, and told his chief plainly that they would be there all night if he allowed himself to be 'drawn' again ; but the manœuvre was often repeated with success by the impious group of independents on the Opposition side.

After the Fourth Party's attack on the Government things quieted down until the end of the session. It was, with a single exception, the culminating point of its Parliamentary activity during the first year of its existence. This exception occurred on the third reading of the Appropriation Bill, when an important discussion on the conduct of the war in Afghanistan was instituted by its members, in the form of a resolution that practically amounted to a motion of censure. The authorities had contrived, by diverting public attention to General Roberts's brilliant achievement at Candahar, to cover up the disastrous defeat sustained by General Burrows on July 26. In the opinion

of the Fourth Party, nothing could be less conducive to the national welfare than this practice of passing over such reverses and minimising their importance. Accordingly, the member for Woodstock, supported by his colleagues, moved 'that the disaster sustained by General Burrows on July 26, far exceeding in magnitude any reverse which has befallen the British arms for more than a quarter of a century, is mainly attributable to the want of foresight, military knowledge, and caution on the part of the Indian Executive.' The facts on which this indictment was based were derived entirely from the papers that had been laid upon the table of the House. They were not in dispute. Lord Randolph Churchill pieced together a circumstantial story from the information contained in these official documents, which, besides showing the disastrous nature of the reverse, helped to fix the responsibility for its occurrence upon the incompetence of the authorities in India. Lord Hartington stated, in reply, that he was not then in a position to lay the complete information on the subject before the House. In deference to this declaration the resolution was withdrawn; but it had produced the desired effect of calling public

attention to the gravity of the events which had taken place before the brilliant tactics of General Roberts retrieved the situation.

The session was now at an end, and the members of the Fourth Party were able to look back with satisfaction on an unbroken series of Parliamentary triumphs. Within the space of four months this small group of Conservatives, some of whom were barely known to the House of Commons, had raised themselves to a position of influence. They had become a force to be reckoned with. Their own party viewed them, for the most part, with disfavour. They had taken little pains to conceal their dissatisfaction with Sir Stafford Northcote's leadership. The rank and file of Conservatives resented this attitude, first, because their chief was extremely popular with all sections of the party; and, secondly, on account of the jealousy which sudden political success necessarily arouses. The Tory Press had all along done its best to ignore them. But in reviewing the past session the 'Times' was compelled to make some reference to a political incident that had been one of its most conspicuous features. 'The rise of a small body of Conservative free-lances below the gangway,' it stated in its issue of

September 7, 1880, 'of whom Lord Randolph Churchill and Mr. Gorst were the chiefs, is a curious incident, and has originated the half-serious nickname of the "Fourth Party."'¹

The exploits of these four political partners, as will be seen hereafter, had awakened both the interest and the sympathy of Lord Beaconsfield. But the Conservative leaders in the House of Commons viewed their proceedings with anything but favour. Their authority had been flouted almost openly ; their weakness in opposition had been shown up with a callous disregard for their susceptibilities ; and they had been made to look ridiculous in the eyes of the House. More than this, a flagrant attack upon their capacity had been made, of all places, at the Carlton Club, the stronghold of respectable incompetence. It was high time, they determined, to put a stop to proceedings which could no longer be regarded as a joke, but had become a standing menace to the domestic tranquillity of the Tory party. Accordingly, during the week following the prorogation of Parliament, Sir Stafford Northcote

¹ An Irish M.P. named Mr. Callan, in the course of a discussion in the House of Commons, bestowed this nickname on Lord Randolph Churchill and his three colleagues.

wrote a letter to Mr. Gorst, in which he observed that he was 'inclined to think that the Fourth Party has done enough for its fame, and that it will be the wiser course for its members now quietly to take their places in the main body, where they will have work enough and to spare.'

This letter, obviously enough, was inspired by a very natural desire on the part of the writer to bring about the dissolution of a highly inconvenient combination of talent. Mr. Gorst at once informed his colleagues about the communication he had received from the leader. 'He has written me a most friendly letter,' he wrote to Sir Henry Wolff, 'in which he proposes that the Fourth Party shall dissolve itself and that the members shall now "quietly" (that adverb is meant for you and Randolph—Balfour and I are always quiet) take their places in the main body—(*i.e.* sit behind Clarke and Dalrymple). I have replied by praising the loyalty and devotion of the Fourth Party and their determination to assist the Goat¹ in resisting the Whigs and Radicals. But every day I am more than ever convinced

¹ A nickname applied to Sir Stafford Northcote. See note, p. 148

that the Goat is meditating a coalition with the Whigs, and that we are one of the great obstacles (and I trust we shall ever so remain) to the attainment of this end.' The next day Mr. Gorst was seized with a brilliant inspiration. Sir Stafford Northcote sat on the front Opposition bench, between Mr. W. H. Smith and Sir Richard Cross—'Marshall and Snelgrove,' as they were nicknamed by the Fourth Party. Whenever an emergency arose he was accustomed to turn to his two neighbours for advice, and whatever they told him to do he obediently carried out. Sagacious and experienced as he was, he never had the courage to act upon his own independent judgment. Mr. Gorst's suggestion to his colleagues was that they should follow up their leader's recommendation 'to take their places in the main body' by sitting immediately behind him. Then, when Sir Stafford attempted to consult with his habitual advisers, two members of the Fourth Party could thrust their heads effectively between him and Sir Richard Cross and Mr. Smith. By pursuing this method they would gradually succeed in supplanting the timid counsels of Sir Stafford's trusted lieutenants by their own vigorous plans of opposition.

The idea was discussed by the four friends over a dinner given by Lord Randolph Churchill, but Mr. Gorst did not succeed in convincing the others of its wisdom. He urged that it would be far better policy to endeavour to utilise Sir Stafford Northcote's great abilities for the advantage of the Conservative party than to aim at the destruction of his authority in the House of Commons. Lord Randolph Churchill, however, did not share this opinion of Sir Stafford's intellectual gifts. He never credited the official leader of the Opposition with the capacity he possessed in the estimation of others, but thought him a statesman of the second rank, who was scarcely fit for the high position he filled. For this reason Lord Randolph declined to accept Mr. Gorst's proposition; though in after years he admitted that it would have been more to his advantage if the advice had been followed. Sir Henry Wolff, equally opposed to the suggestion that Sir Stafford Northcote should be captured by the Fourth Party, cast his vote into the opposite scale; and the question was finally decided by Mr. Balfour declaring that his legs were too long for him to occupy a seat behind the Treasury Bench. This was, of

course, merely a humorous subterfuge. No length of limb would be permitted to interfere with political exigencies. The strengthening of Sir Stafford's position, even were the strings to be pulled by the Fourth Party, was hardly a proposition that commended itself to Lord Salisbury's nephew.

'Vanity Fair' was at that time edited as well as owned by Mr. T. Gibson Bowles. It had for many years enjoyed great popularity as a weekly journal, both on account of the brilliant literary and political articles of its clever editor, and through the publication of the admirable cartoons drawn by Mr. Leslie Ward, who had succeeded Pellegrini early in the 'seventies. To be caricatured by 'Spy' was then, as now, a sure indication of eminence. The rise of the Fourth Party had naturally caught the editorial eye of Mr. Bowles, who always possessed a sincere admiration for the bold qualities of the political free-lance; and before the end of the session he had quite made up his mind that its members were pre-eminently worthy of the enduring fame of Mr. Ward's brush. A sitting was accordingly arranged early in November at 'Spy's' studio in the neighbourhood of Lowndes Square.

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Mr. Balfour came specially up to town from Whittingehame, his place in Scotland, for the occasion. 'I shall be haggard and ghastly of hue from the effects of a night journey,' he complained to one of the Fourth Party; 'but that will be taken to be a consequence of the anxiety and labour which my Parliamentary efforts on behalf of my country have forced me to undergo, and of the pain which the behaviour of my colleagues has so often inflicted.'

The members of the Fourth Party arrived together at Mr. Leslie Ward's studio in the best of spirits.¹ Each was anxious to impress upon the artist the foibles and idiosyncrasies of his friends, in order that they might be made the subject of caricature. Lord Randolph was urged to twist his moustache after his characteristic fashion; willing hands tilted Sir Henry Wolff's hat well over his eyes; it was generally insisted that Mr. Gorst should stroke his beard in the contemplative fashion to which the House had become accustomed; and no efforts of attenuation on Mr. Balfour's part would satisfy his colleagues. Mr. Ward had carefully studied his subject in the House of Commons,

¹ The author is indebted to Mr. Ward for his kindness in endeavouring to recall the scene.

and was anxious to reproduce a typical pose. He begged the Fourth Party to throw itself into the business heart and soul. Thereupon Lord Randolph Churchill, always ready to enter into the humour of a situation, commenced delivering a mock speech with a great deal of overdone energy. No bench being available, the rest of the party took up their respective positions in ordinary chairs; and Mr. Ward well remembers the unsuccessful efforts that were made to discover a piece of furniture capable of accommodating the peculiar sprawl which Mr. Balfour's partners insisted that he ought to adopt. In the end, in fact, the future Prime Minister's attitude necessarily became a work of imagination rather than a study from real life.

It was now determined to give a public demonstration of the power and influence of the Fourth Party. A great success had been achieved during the past session in the House of Commons; but a Parliamentary triumph did not alone satisfy the aspirations of its members. They wanted to assert themselves in a more concrete way before the country at large, and to receive the universal recognition to which their merits entitled them. Lord Randolph

Churchill was always good at inventing an effective *mise en scène*, and he proposed a demonstration in the neighbourhood of Blenheim Palace as being eminently calculated to attract attention. A ready excuse was found in the newly formed Woodstock Conservative Association, and it was arranged that the inaugural ceremony should take the shape of a great political dinner. Having selected the scenery and groundwork of the play, it became necessary to allocate the parts. A Conservative leader was an essential factor in the scheme, and circumstances naturally pointed to Lord Salisbury to fill the rôle. Mr. Balfour undertook to conduct the negotiations with his uncle, and it was presently announced that a public banquet would be held at Woodstock on November 30, that Lord Salisbury had consented to be present, and that he intended to make a speech.

This announcement created the greatest excitement in political circles. It was believed and hoped by many Conservatives belonging to what the Fourth Party irreverently called the 'Old Gang' that the group of rebels was about to capitulate. The fact that Lord Salisbury would address the gathering seemed fully to warrant this conclusion. But the

coming event was shrouded in mystery, and the sequel was awaited with the liveliest curiosity. As a matter of fact, there can be little doubt that Lord Salisbury's consent was not given without careful deliberation or without consulting Lord Beaconsfield's wishes. The leaders probably thought it desirable to remove as far as possible the impression, created by the events of the session, that the Conservative party was divided against itself, and were not reluctant to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded them by this occasion. The Fourth Party mustered at the banquet in full force; and amongst others at the high table, besides the principal speakers, were Lord Jersey, Sir M. Ridley, Colonel North, and Mr. Chaplin. A number of undergraduates, representing a political club at Oxford, also took part in the festivities—prominent amongst them being Mr. George Curzon, now Lord Curzon of Kedleston. Interest was naturally concentrated upon the speeches delivered by Lord Salisbury and Lord Randolph Churchill, and there was much speculation as to the manner in which the delicate topic that gave piquancy to the proceedings—namely, the relations between the Conservative leaders

and the Fourth Party—would be handled by the two principals in the scene about to be enacted.

Lord Randolph Churchill, who occupied the chair, was the first speaker. As had been pre-arranged by the four allies, he took the line of expatiating on the loyalty of himself and his friends to Lord Beaconsfield, who, of course, was the actual chief of the Conservative party. Absolutely no reference was made by him to the leadership of Sir Stafford Northcote, whose name he carefully refrained from mentioning at all, confining himself strictly to the utterance of loyal sentiments towards their great leader in the House of Lords. In his turn Lord Salisbury was equally adroit. He was careful that his opening sentences should bear special reference to the nominal chief in the Commons. 'We are accustomed,' he said, 'not merely to uphold abstract sentiments, but to act heartily together; and even during the short session that has passed away since the election which placed the Conservative party in a minority, those who, under the sagacious guidance of Sir Stafford Northcote, represent Conservative principles in the House of Commons, have

shown themselves an active, an energetic and a thoroughly united party; and those whom I now address, mainly consisting of the constituents of the ancient borough of Woodstock, will feel no slight satisfaction in the reflection that there was no man who contributed to the manly attitude of the Conservative party by his energy, and his ability, and his resource so much as my noble friend in the chair, the member for Woodstock.'

Lord Randolph and his friends had thus achieved their object of demonstrating to the country the position and influence of the Fourth Party. They had emphasised once more, by the exclusion of Sir Stafford Northcote's name when making a profession of loyalty to their leader, the dissatisfaction they felt with the conduct of the Opposition in the House of Commons. But they had made it clear to everybody, by the profession of unswerving fidelity to Lord Beaconsfield, that their independent action was intended in the interest of the Conservative party, and was in no sense hostile to it as a whole. 'The site of the building and its temporary character were alike appropriate,' said the 'Daily News' next day. 'Naturally it was set in the protecting

shadow of Blenheim, and naturally it was but a temporary building, seeing that it was devoted to the uses of a party whose great exploits are still in the future, and whose expectations are so vast that it would be impossible for them as yet to say what extent of splendid structure may not be needed for their fitting accommodation this time twelve months. Lord Salisbury was evidently brought to Woodstock to launch the Fourth Party, and he did so in the most energetic and satisfactory manner. He sent forth Lord Randolph Churchill to battle with a fervour of hopeful goodwill and encouragement which might almost have reminded some persons of the Grand Duchess of Gerolstein investing her young hero, Fritz, with the war-dinted sabre of her immortal sire. When Lord Salisbury spoke of the Conservatives who, "under the sagacious guidance of Sir Stafford Northcote, have shown themselves an active, an energetic, and a thoroughly united party," he must surely have puzzled his audience. What party was that? It is true that there was during last session a Conservative party active, energetic, and thoroughly united, but then it was a party of four, and it was not in any way whatever under the guidance of Sir

Stafford Northcote. The Conservative party as a whole was not active, or energetic, or thoroughly united during the last session. Perhaps we may infer from Lord Salisbury's speech of last night that Sir Stafford Northcote has accepted the terms of the Fourth Party, and has undertaken to lead in any direction which they think fit to point out. Lord Salisbury is not an insignificant or an irresponsible man, and we freely admit that the manner in which he commended Lord Randolph Churchill to the Conservative party last night is likely to add considerably to the importance of that self-satisfied politician. Lord Salisbury distinctly endorsed all that Lord Randolph Churchill had done, and bade him go on as he began. It is only reasonable to assume, therefore, that Sir Stafford Northcote is prepared to accept the new conditions of leadership. He has our sincere commiseration.'

The Liberal Press interpreted the Woodstock meeting as a public recognition of the power of the Fourth Party. The principal Tory papers of the time professed, however, to take the opposite view. During the session they had ignored its existence as far as possible, and had endeavoured to explain away the

incidents in which it had figured in Parliament by stating that such events always followed great party defeats. It was perfectly natural, they declared, that in the ensuing disorganisation the young and energetic men should be the first to recover themselves. It was the mere chance of these four members sitting together below the gangway that had given them the delusive appearance of a separate party. They now chose to assume that the Woodstock meeting had finally dissolved the political combination, and that the erring members had returned to the fold, and would in future place themselves under the sagacious guidance of the Opposition leader in the House of Commons. 'Lord Randolph Churchill and Sir Henry Drummond Wolff,' stated the 'Times' the morning after the Fourth Party demonstration at Woodstock, 'are not bent on forming a new party with the assistance of Mr. Balfour and Mr. Gorst.'

That the chief Tory organs were completely mistaken in their estimate of the situation the political events of the future were not slow in proving. The fact of the matter was that they feared the growing influence of this independent group to be of a

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revolutionary character, and not to make for peace within the Conservative ranks. Recognition was not yet given to the services performed by the Fourth Party in creating an energetic and effectively organised Opposition in the House of Commons, capable of seconding the policy of Lord Beaconsfield, the leader of the party. The campaign against timidity and inaction was to be carried on, therefore, without encouragement from the Tory Press, to succeed in the end by sheer force of determination.

What
policy

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST QUARREL

ALLUSIONS have been made in the foregoing pages to the fact that Lord Beaconsfield regarded the Fourth Party and its doings with sympathy. He had been informed as to its intended action during the Bradlaugh dispute, and knew beforehand of all Sir Henry Wolff's proceedings in that connection. It was quite natural that the rise of this independent group of Conservatives should have claimed more than ordinary interest on his part. Disraeli had never forgotten his early struggles, and throughout his political career he always encouraged young talent. Many a new member, or serious-minded politician contending for recognition, received from him a helping hand and sympathetic advice. To the end of his life he preserved a fellow-feeling for those who, like himself, had to rely upon their own energies and talents to win their way to the front. The

great Conservative leader could not have been blind to the deficient manner in which the Opposition was led in the House of Commons, and it is not improbable that he viewed the activity of Lord Randolph Churchill and his friends with positive approval. He endeavoured, as will be seen, to keep the peace between the Fourth Party and Sir Stafford Northcote, but the encouragement he gave the former at the same time points irresistibly to the conclusion that he thoroughly approved of the service it was rendering in Parliament.

At the close of the session Lord Beaconsfield, recognising the seriousness and importance of this new movement in the Conservative party, wrote to Mr. Gorst, inviting him to go down to Hughenden for a couple of days and discuss with him the position, policy, and prospects of the Fourth Party. The visit took place early in November. The leader expressed entire approval of the energy and independence of its action ; but his general advice was that notice should be given to Sir Stafford Northcote of all its intended proceedings in the House of Commons. As for the doings of the Fourth Party outside Parliament, Lord Beaconsfield encouraged the assumption of freedom and

originality. He expressed himself in favour of its members acting, both in speech and in writing, with complete independence, as far as that part of their political campaigning was concerned. The result of his talk with the leader was summarised by Mr. Gorst, on the second and concluding day of his visit, in a letter to Lord Randolph Churchill. 'Lord B.,' he wrote, 'was in his talk anything but goaty¹: he generally expressed great confidence in us, thought we had a brilliant future before us, and promised to help and advise us as much as he could. I can in a letter only state dogmatically what the oracle said, without giving all his arguments.

'First, we ought *not* to pledge ourselves to support the Government in any coercive measures for Ireland. They have encouraged agitation, they have adopted dilatory and inefficient proceedings, and they don't deserve the confidence of Parliament. We should therefore hold ourselves free to take what course we think best when the Government lay their proposals before us. B. will prevent Northcote,

¹ This expression was used habitually by the Fourth Party to denote the weak-kneed Conservatism characteristic of the 'Old Gang.' It was derived from the nickname 'the Goat' applied to Sir Stafford Northcote in the same sense.

if he can, from making any more pledges. Meanwhile our attitude may be ostentatiously one of reserve. There is a precedent for suspending the Habeas Corpus to suppress Ribbon outrages in the Westmeath Act of 1871.

‘Second, B. himself broached the idea that Gladstone may buy off the Irish landlords. He thinks this would be to us a very dangerous move. But there is no use in talking about it, either in public or private. Nor can we say how the matter should be dealt with till the move is made. B. has always been in favour of the purchase by the tenant under Bright’s clauses ; Lord Salisbury has always supported an extension of this.

‘Third, he scouted the idea of Northcote thinking of coalition or being inclined to Derby, and did not bear out what Wolff said about his supporting Derby in the late Cabinet. We need not consult Northcote when Parliament is not sitting. It would be good policy to abuse Government for not summoning Parliament to consider the state of Ireland, and to say that their object in not doing so was to conceal their Eastern policy. We should always courteously inform N., through the Whip, of any step we

are about to take in the House of Commons, and listen with respect and attention to anything he may say about it; his remarks, even when we disagree with him, will be well worth attention. But just at present *we need not be too scrupulous about obeying our leader.*

An open rupture between us would, however, be most disastrous; but Lord B. thinks if we are courteous and firm Northcote will make no open rupture, and will not throw us over. . . .

‘Fourth, upon alteration of the rules of the House there is to be the most absolute and unyielding resistance. Cairns has agreed to this, and they will force N. to be firm. There was a Committee on the subject twenty years ago, which took some very interesting evidence, including that of M. Guizot, on the *clôture*, which we ought to look up.’¹

This report, written directly after Mr. Gorst’s conversation with his chief, gives considerable insight into the position of the Fourth Party as a factor of political importance, and into the general state of the Conservative Opposition. Lord Beaconsfield talked very frankly and confidentially to his guest. It is

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 155.

clear from what he said that he was prepared to place a good deal of reliance upon the four active spirits in the party as a political weapon, and that he was much impressed with the possibilities that lay before them in the future. The advice he gave about keeping up a pretence of consulting Sir Stafford Northcote, without being in the least bound by his recommendations, indicates that he fully appreciated the importance of preserving, outside the inner counsels of the party, an appearance of unity ; but that he was keenly alive to the lamentable weakness displayed during the past session by his lieutenant in the House of Commons.

Additional light has been thrown on this point by Sir Henry Wolff, who also had an interview with Lord Beaconsfield in the autumn of 1880 at his house in Curzon Street. 'We discussed the situation,' he writes, 'and I explained how the action of the Conservative party was crippled by the over-caution, not to say indecision, of Sir Stafford Northcote, which led him constantly to throw us over. He replied almost word for word as follows :

“ When Mr. Gladstone announced his withdrawal from public life I fully believed his

statement, which was confirmed to me from special sources in which I placed the most implicit reliance. I thought that when he was gone Northcote would be able to cope with anyone likely to assume the lead on the other side, and I wanted rest. I now much regret having retired from the House of Commons, as Mr. Gladstone, contrary to my firm persuasion, returned. I fully appreciate your feelings and those of your friends, but you must stick to Northcote. He represents the respectability of the party. I wholly sympathise with you all, because I never was respectable myself. In my time the respectability of the party was represented by —, a horrid man ; but I had to do as well as I could ; you must do the same. Don't on any account break with Northcote, but defer to him as often as you can. Whenever it becomes too difficult, you can come to me, and I will try to arrange matters. Meanwhile I will speak to him." ¹

The following letter, written by Sir Henry Wolff to Lord Randolph Churchill, affords a further illustration of the estimation in which the Fourth Party was held at the end of its first session in Parliament.

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 157.

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Cromwell House, Putney :
September 29, 1880.

My dear Randolph,—After you left yesterday I received two very handsome tributes to the Fourth Party—one from Lord Cadogan, who said that he would look with dread at its being done away with, as being the only portion of the Conservative party that did any good at all ; the other was from a man whose name I cannot recollect, and who came up to me in St. James's Street to say he had been staying with Chenery, the editor of the 'Times,' who had expressed himself very warmly as to the future of the Fourth Party. I shall try and see Chenery ; and as Burrows was sent to the Wali's forces, I shall endeavour, I hope with better success, to confirm his fidelity.

Ever yours sincerely,
H. D. W.¹

It must not be supposed that the members of the Fourth Party were privately on bad terms with many of those who were their special objects of attack in the House of Commons. They possessed, on the contrary, many warm friends on either Front Bench.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Sir Henry James frequently accepted invitations to dine in their company. Sir Richard Cross, whose influence with Sir Stafford Northcote they were so anxious to destroy, shared their hospitality at least on one occasion. They even gave dinners to Sir William Harcourt and Sir Charles Dilke, their most uncompromising opponents in Parliament. 'Mr. Chamberlain himself was invited,' writes Mr. Winston Churchill; 'though this greatly shocked the Duke of Marlborough, who did not understand how his son could cultivate social relations with a person of such pernicious opinions, and was quite sure House of Commons' traditions must have greatly changed since he succeeded.'

Before the end of the year which had witnessed the rise of the Fourth Party at Westminster and its apotheosis at Woodstock, a rumour was published to the effect that Parliament would be summoned early in January to pass a Coercion Bill. The condition of Ireland had been one of increasing gravity for months past. When the Liberal Government took office in the spring the Irish people hailed the event with acclamation, in the belief that their grievances would be attended to without

delay. Gladstone had given them the Land Act of 1870, which they naturally regarded as an instalment in the direction of reform. When he came back to power after the fall of the Beaconsfield Ministry, they expected him to lose no time in dealing more comprehensively with the gross injustices of the land-tenure system in Ireland. The circumstance that the Queen's Speech contained no sympathetic reference to Irish affairs produced the first shock of disappointment; and when the Government tamely submitted to the rejection of its Compensation for Disturbance Bill by the Lords the anger of the people knew no bounds. In vain did the Irish Nationalists at Westminster entreat the Cabinet to stand firm and to send up the Bill again, or to introduce another. The Government, already in a tangle of legislation, out of which, even with the assistance of Lord Randolph Churchill and his energetic co-operators, it was unable to extricate itself, refused to do anything of the kind. When the Irish tenantry realised that nothing was to be done for them they gave way to despair. General Gordon visited the south-west of Ireland in the autumn of that year, hoping to discover how some settlement could

be made of the Irish question. A letter he addressed to a friend at the time, extracts from which have often been quoted, shows how bad things really were.

‘No half-measured Acts,’ he declared, ‘which left the landlord with any say to the tenantry of these portions of Ireland will be of any use. They would be rendered, as past Land Acts in Ireland have been, quite abortive; for the landlords will insert clauses to do away with their force. Any half-measures will only place the Government face to face with the people of Ireland as the champions of the landlord class. . . . In conclusion, I must say, from all accounts and my own observations, that the state of our fellow-countrymen in the parts I have named is worse than that of any people in the world, let alone Europe. I believe that these people are made as we are; that they are patient beyond belief, loyal, but at the same time broken-spirited and desperate, living on the verge of starvation in places where we would not keep our cattle. Our comic prints do an infinity of harm by their caricatures. Firstly, the caricatures are not true, for the crime in Ireland is not **greater** than that in England; and, secondly, they

exasperate the people on both sides of the Channel, and they do no good. It is ill to laugh and scoff at a question which affects our existence.'

Michael Davitt, who had organised the Land League, and Parnell, the new Irish leader, who had entirely thrown in his lot with the agrarian agitators, were powerless to prevent an outbreak of violence, although both did their best to keep the Fenian element within bounds. Outrages were committed daily; murderous assaults, maiming of cattle, threats and terrorism became the recognised everyday routine in many of the affected districts in Ireland. Boy-cotting was instituted in response to a careless hint thrown out by Parnell in the course of a public speech, and proved a far more effectual method of intimidating landlords and their agents than moonlighting or dynamite. Parnell and the entire executive of the Land League were prosecuted to no purpose: a jury could not have been found in any part of Ireland that would have dared convict them, even had it wished to do so. The Chief Secretary determined to put down violence with a high hand. In October military reinforcements were sent across St. George's Channel. A few weeks later

the Cabinet was petitioned from Dublin Castle to take steps to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act, the Lord-Lieutenant threatening resignation if his demand were not complied with. The country was agitated by incessant Cabinet Councils; and in the end the Government yielded a reluctant consent to the Irish Executive and summoned Parliament to meet on January 7.

These events were followed with close attention by the Fourth Party. Lord Randolph Churchill, in particular, watched their course with a keenly critical eye, and expressed his views to the country in no measured terms. 'How,' he said at Preston a few days before Christmas, 'will this Government, who have only been eight months in office, meet Parliament, and what will be the message which they will have to announce? They will have to acknowledge the fact that Ireland is in open and successful rebellion; that another government, which knows not the Queen, has supplanted the Government which the English and Scotch people recognise; that this alien government is now, with impunity, directing the destinies of Ireland, issuing its decrees to the Irish people, and has, for six months or more, suspended the liberties, confiscated the property,

and imperilled the lives of hundreds and thousands of the Queen's subjects. They will have to announce that this alien government has its own revenues, its own executive, its own courts of justice, in which persons are arraigned, tried and condemned, and that persons who are not provided with the passports of that government and who have not enrolled themselves as its subjects are unable to obtain the necessaries of life, and are cut off root and branch from the society of their fellows. They will have to acknowledge that this alien government is the growth of the brief period during which they have held office, that nothing like it has yet been seen in the history of Ireland, and that before it the Government of the Queen recoils, paralysed and impotent.'

The projected Coercion Act was destined to exercise a disastrous influence on the immediate fortunes of the Fourth Party. Lord Randolph Churchill had seen too much of the misery of the Irish people under oppression to view any measure of coercion, however necessary, with toleration. 'People sometimes talk too lightly of coercion,' he declared; 'it means that hundreds of Irishmen who, if law had been maintained unaltered and had been firmly

enforced, would now have been leading peaceful, industrious and honest lives, will soon be torn off to prison without trial ; that others will have to fly the country into hopeless exile ; that others, driven to desperation through such cruel alternatives, will perhaps shed their blood and sacrifice their lives in vain resistance to the forces of the Crown ; that many Irish homes, which would have been happy if evil courses had been firmly checked at the outset, will soon be bereaved of their most promising ornaments and support, disgraced by a felon's cell and by a convict's garb ; and if you look back over the brief period which has been necessary to bring about such terrible results, the mind recoils in horror from the ghastly spectacle of murdered landlords, tenant-farmers tortured, mutilated dumb animals, which everywhere disfigures the green and fertile pastures of Ireland.'

In this mood he met his colleagues on December 26, when they dined with Sir Henry Wolff at the Garrick for the purpose of discussing the situation. Lord Randolph was always fertile in ideas, and excelled in the manufacture of what he called 'political dynamite.' The proposed Coercion Act would naturally secure the support of the Conservative party, and

things had come to such a pass that the most drastic measures were clearly needed to enable the Irish Executive to deal with the lawless elements in Ireland. The idea occurred to him that the Fourth Party should move an amendment proposing to limit the duration of the Act to one year. The suggestion naturally startled his friends. It would be a novel, and at the same time an audacious, proposition to bring forward from any quarter of the House. To suggest it from the Conservative benches was almost blasphemy. They were by no means averse to taking startling courses and to act generally in an unconventional way ; but Lord Randolph's proposal was not one to be accepted without reflection.

The manœuvre possessed obvious advantages. It would probably receive the support of the Irish party, as an excellent means of hampering the passage of the Coercion Bill ; men on both sides of the House who had a pronounced dislike for extreme measures might give a certain amount of moral assistance to the abstract principle ; and it provided ample material for enabling energetic opponents of the Government policy to render legislation a difficult and protracted task. But it involved a

responsibility towards the Tory party as a whole from which Lord Randolph's colleagues shrank. They were unanimously of the opinion that this was a matter on which their official leaders ought to be consulted. Lord Beaconsfield had shown an active interest in them, and had expressed the wish that they should consult either him or Sir Stafford Northcote before taking action in the House of Commons. Here was plainly a case in which this desire ought to be respected. The chief's great Parliamentary experience would enable him to form a far sounder judgment on the subject than the Fourth Party was capable of doing, and it was urged that his advice should be asked. To this course Lord Randolph consented, and Mr. Gorst was deputed to seek an interview with Lord Beaconsfield forthwith and lay the matter before him.

On the last day of December the consultation accordingly took place. Lord Beaconsfield listened attentively to all that Mr. Gorst had to say to him on the subject. He threw no cold water on the project. The idea, he admitted, was a very good one purely from the standpoint of tactics and as a means of embarrassing the Government. But he

wanted, before committing himself to a definite opinion, to think it well over, and promised to let the Fourth Party know in the course of a few days what he would advise it to do. This interview took place six days before the opening of Parliament. On the evening before the commencement of a new session it is customary for the leaders of the political parties to give dinners to their supporters, at which the Royal Speech is read out to the assembled guests. As an act of courtesy the Opposition leaders in the Lords and the Commons are each provided with a copy of the Speech for this purpose. When, therefore, the Fourth Party met at the Café Royal for its first Parliamentary dinner, its members affected to be greatly dismayed at finding that no copy of the Queen's Speech had been sent to any one of them. It was, they thought, a scandalous omission on the part of the authorities. As an independent party in the State they were distinctly entitled to share in a privilege traditionally extended to the Opposition and Irish leaders. The dinner, in spite of this *contretemps*, passed off hilariously. The four friends were in the best spirits. The session before them was rich

in promise of lively proceedings, which they intended to render still livelier. Lord Randolph was particularly elated. He felt confident that Lord Beaconsfield would return a favourable answer, and that his pet project, on which he built very high hopes, would be put into speedy execution. They discussed their position and prospects with much satisfaction. In a single session they had become a power in the House of Commons equally feared and respected. They were a real force in politics, and even the country had begun to take them seriously. No shadow of coming differences disturbed the harmony of the evening. They had never been gayer, and chaffed and joked with each other without the least suspicion of an impending quarrel that would wreck their activity at the very beginning of the session from which they anticipated so much.

The bombshell came in the shape of Lord Beaconsfield's decision. After mature reflection he had come to the conclusion that Lord Randolph Churchill's proposition had better not be carried into effect. The plan, he admitted, was highly ingenious, but he did not regard it as practicable for a Conservative

Opposition. His advice to the Fourth Party was to drop the idea. This decision was intensely disappointing to the author of the scheme, who had confidently built on obtaining the approval of their leader. The others shared this feeling, but they were naturally prepared to accept Lord Beaconsfield's verdict. When once Lord Randolph Churchill had taken it into his head to do a certain thing, however, it was very difficult to persuade him to alter his mind. He adhered vehemently to his original plan, and endeavoured to persuade his colleagues to assist him in carrying it out, notwithstanding the advice that had been tendered by the chief. To this they were unable to assent. They pointed out that it would be a fatal mistake, having asked the party leader for advice, to ignore it when given. In vain they urged that, after all, an opinion expressed by a man of Lord Beaconsfield's immense political experience, given, not hastily, but after mature thought, was likely to be right. Lord Randolph was not in the mood to listen to argument. The opposition of his friends only had the effect of making him stick more stubbornly to his guns. He refused to hear reason, and roundly accused them of cowardice

and desertion. They, on the other hand, flatly declined to pursue a course contrary to the direct wish of Lord Beaconsfield, and in this way to flout the opinion of their leader, which they had deliberately obtained from him. Heated words followed, and Lord Randolph went off angrily declaring that, since the rest of the Fourth Party refused to help him, he would go on with his amendment to the Coercion Bill without their aid.

The quarrel developed into a serious one. When the session commenced Lord Randolph and his colleagues were completely estranged. The independent group below the gangway had practically ceased to exist as a political combination. There were no more dinners or miniature cabinet councils. The three friendly members—Mr. Balfour, Mr. Gorst, and Sir Henry Wolff—continued to support each other on particular occasions; but to all intents and purposes the Fourth Party was dissolved, and no longer participated, as heretofore, in combined action and a common policy.

CHAPTER X

HEALING THE BREACH

WHEN Parliament met on January 6, 1881, nobody was under the least delusion as to the difficulties and dangers that lay in front of the Ministry. Legislators had been specially summoned to deal with an emergency, and the state of Ireland had become so critical that the most sanguine politician looked forward to an unusually stormy session. Few, however, could have dreamt of what was in store for them, or have imagined that they stood upon the threshold of a period of Parliamentary history that would be designated for all time as the high-water mark of political disorder. The Speech from the Throne, which had made little more than passing allusion to Irish affairs in the previous year, was now mainly occupied with the subject. Coercion was to be applied ; Parliament had been summoned six weeks before its usual time of meeting for that

express purpose ; and thus the complete failure of the new Government's Irish policy was publicly proclaimed. Mr. W. E. Forster lost no time in introducing his first Coercion Bill. Within a fortnight of the commencement of the session the Protection to Person and Property Bill was brought in by him. The object of this measure was to enable the authorities in Ireland to arrest and imprison any person suspected of an inclination to promote disturbance in the country. It was powers of this kind to which Lord Randolph Churchill was most implacably opposed, especially when it was proposed to place them in the hands of a Liberal Government, and which he had intended to thwart as far as possible by limiting their operation to a twelvemonth.

But the projected amendment, which had cost him the co-operation of his political friends, was never moved. 'I support this Bill,' he declared in the House of Commons, 'with reluctance and distrust. I am confident that a proper and vigorous administration of the ordinary law last summer and last autumn would have saved us from this Bill. I cannot with satisfaction entrust extraordinary powers to a Minister who has proved unequal to the

administration of the ordinary law of the land. I know that those powers require to be administered with firmness and decision. The more these qualities abound, the sooner the necessity for extraordinary powers will cease ; but I fear that we shall have indecision and timidity, and, consequently, injustice and protracted coercion.' He urged, at various stages of the Bill's passage through the House, many concessions that would have the effect of ameliorating the conditions of arrest and imprisonment, and shocked his party very much by advocating that the arrest of members of Parliament under the Act should in all cases be reported to the House. Meanwhile, the solution of the mystery as to how he came to drop the cherished amendment, which had caused such a heated quarrel, was only conjectured by the surviving members of the Fourth Party. Lord Randolph's father, the Duke of Marlborough, had been greatly perturbed when his son's intention to propose the limitation of the Coercion Act reached his ears. His experience as Viceroy led him to anticipate the bad result which such a course would be likely to produce on the people of Ireland, and he lost no time in conveying his fears to

Lord Randolph's colleagues. He urged them to dissuade his son from taking the step in contemplation, believing that it would be more politic to get them to use their influence than to interfere in the matter himself. They naturally replied that they had already done everything in their power to persuade Lord Randolph to give up his project, but had obtained no better result than to bring about a quarrel. The Duke's own powers of persuasion, it was urged by them, were much more likely to prove successful under the circumstances; and the subsequent abandonment of the intended motion convinced them that the Duke had accepted their suggestion and obtained his way.

As early as the third night of the debate on the Address Lord Randolph had expressed his views about coercion with characteristic vigour. Speaking on Parnell's amendment condemning the Irish policy of the Government, he said that he doubted whether a more cynical or unprincipled position had ever been taken up by a Prime Minister, declaring that the object of the Government was not to protect the lives and liberties of the Irish people, or to maintain the supremacy of the law, but to consider whether by so doing they might not endanger

the unity of the Liberal party. The only reason why Parliament was not called together in the autumn, in order to prevent the establishment of a reign of terror in Ireland, was because the Cabinet feared they would not be supported by a large number of their followers. That was certainly a novel, and not a very respectable, view of Ministerial responsibility. Mr. Gladstone's object, he asserted, was not the peace of Ireland, not the good name of the Government, but only the unity of the Liberal party.

In this strain Lord Randolph proceeded to make a long and brilliant attack on the Cabinet. At one point in his speech, however, he was interrupted by the Chief Secretary, who refused to give way. It had been agreed by the members of the Fourth Party that they should invariably help each other out of difficulties ; and, although they were no longer on speaking terms with their self-willed colleague, one of them at once came to the rescue and appealed to the Chair on his behalf. Unfortunately, the quarrel had gone too far for any immediate reconciliation. During the month of January there were two great scenes of Irish obstruction. Upon one occasion the House sat from four o'clock on Tuesday afternoon until five

minutes past two on the afternoon of the following day ; and on the last day of the month the sitting was prolonged, amid scenes of obstruction and disorder, until half-past nine on the morning of February 2. In neither of these dramatic debates was any prominent part taken by the Fourth Party. Even Lord Randolph Churchill's restless activity seemed to have been destroyed by the isolation from his colleagues.

This sudden transformation of four belligerent spirits into a mute and dejected group of non-combatants could not fail to attract the attention of the House. The surviving remnant of the Fourth Party tried on one occasion to explain away the obvious tameness of its negative attitude. On January 25 Gladstone moved a resolution, which resulted in one of the all-night sittings alluded to above, that the Coercion Bills should have precedence of all orders of the day and notices of motion. In former days Lord Randolph and his friends would have taken the most conspicuous part in the proceedings that ensued ; but under the spell of their divided counsels they sat silent below the gangway. At last the silence was broken by Mr. Gorst. He stated that the time

had now arrived when independent members on that side of the House should state the position which they had taken up during the present session, and give notice to the Government as to the extent to which their support could be relied upon. He did not think that the Government could complain of the conduct of the independent members on that side of the House during the present session. In giving a tacit consent to the policy of the Government they had hitherto, practically, altogether effaced themselves. They had taken no part in the discussions that had occurred, and had contented themselves with giving silent votes in favour of the Government on an occasion which the Government said was one of great national importance.

The idea of the Fourth Party effacing itself amused the House very much; but it was plain to everybody that something had occurred to disturb the harmony of its four members. An allusion to this state of affairs was openly made, in fact, by Sir William Harcourt. It was difficult, he said, to treat the member for Woodstock as a serious politician or to discover to which of the four parties he belonged. He once belonged to his own—the

Fourth Party ; but he had managed by his conduct during the discussion of the Coercion Bill to dissolve that minute party ; and his feats in that respect only afforded a fresh illustration of the infinite divisibility of matter.

Even the great debate from January 31 to February 2, when leave to introduce the Coercion Bill was only granted after a discussion that was accompanied by scenes of disorder such as the Irish alone are capable of engineering, and which lasted five days, failed to 'draw' the independent group below the gangway. The Irish would have continued the discussion until the prorogation of Parliament, if the Speaker, after sharing the fatigue of a forty hours' debate with his Deputy, had not put an unconventional end to it by declining to call on any more members and by putting the question from the chair on his own responsibility. In ordinary circumstances Lord Randolph Churchill and Mr. Gorst would have been rising to order all day and night ; Mr. Balfour would have intervened with at least one calmly reasoned speech ; and Sir Henry Wolff would have fanned the flames whenever they were dying down with his masterly gift of stirring up political controversy. Yet a member of the

Fourth Party only rose to a point of order on one solitary occasion ; whilst Lord Randolph's total contribution to the proceedings was restricted to the asking of a question at the moment of their termination.

This state of things could not last indefinitely. In the first place, the members of the Fourth Party were losing political ground. It was not the mere fact of combination that had led to their unexampled Parliamentary success in the foregoing session, but the peculiar composition of qualities made up by the four friends. Sir Henry James, alluding to Lord Randolph Churchill and Mr. Gorst, once complained of them as a poachers' combination—a pointer to find game and a greyhound to run it down. That was only a limited aspect of it. Sir Henry Wolff and Mr. Balfour brought other characteristics into the alliance : one supplemented the other. The Fourth Party that had developed the Bradlaugh controversy, that had made the Employers' Liability Act more democratic, that had attacked the Opposition leader in his own stronghold, and that had compelled public eulogy from a highly placed Conservative statesman, was not the decimated group below the gangway at the beginning of

the session in 1881. Its action was paralysed ; it had ceased to count as a political force ; ' Marshall and Snelgrove ' exercised undisputed sway over the conduct of the Opposition.

But there was a second and more personal reason why the uncomfortable situation was destined to come to a speedy end. Lord Randolph was a man who acted impulsively, and whose impulses were usually of a generous nature. His affections were easily touched ; an appeal to his heart was never made in vain ; his genuine friendships were lifelong. These qualities are vividly discernible in his unpublished correspondence with Sir Henry Wolff—letters full of witticisms and personalities, but often containing an under-current of deep feeling in which the real nature of the writer is touchingly revealed. He was not the man to allow a quarrel to go on indefinitely that was chiefly of his own making. Like a child, he sulked for a time ; but, also like a child, it was impossible for him to keep it up for long.

Curiously enough, it was the reopening of the Bradlaugh controversy that provided the opportunity for reuniting the members of the Fourth Party, as it had, in the first instance, been the means of bringing them together. It

came about in the following way. On March 14 Bradlaugh rose in his place for the purpose of presenting a petition. The High Court had just decided that the member for Northampton had no right to make a solemn affirmation instead of taking the oath prescribed by law. Mr. Gorst, therefore, acting for himself and his two surviving colleagues, immediately interposed the objection that Bradlaugh was not a member of the House, and was consequently ineligible to present a petition. The first vote he had given, he argued, and the first day he had sat in the House, the seat for Northampton had become by law vacant, exactly as if the owner of it were dead. He submitted to the House that under the circumstances, when its own Committee had determined that Bradlaugh was not entitled to make an affirmation, when the House itself had confirmed by resolution the opinion of this Committee, and when a court of law had decided that he was not entitled to make an affirmation instead of an oath, he ought not to sit and vote and take part in the proceedings of the House as long as the opinions and judgments of the Committee, the House, and the court of law remained uncontradicted and unreversed.

The references to the member for Northampton by name were received at first with loud cries of 'Order!' But it would naturally have been inconsistent with the argument to have alluded to Bradlaugh in any other terms. When Mr. Gorst sat down the House was alternately taken possession of by Sir Henry James, Sir John Holker, and Mr. Labouchere. Then an unexpected thing happened. Lord Randolph Churchill, without having exchanged a syllable with his neighbours on the front Opposition bench below the gangway, rose up for the purpose of supporting his quondam friend. He referred to him as 'my hon. and learned friend,' and said he was 'perfectly certain' that Mr. Gorst would be satisfied if Bradlaugh would withdraw, and consider his status as *sub judice* pending the decision of the House on the question of issuing a writ. Then, in the most primitive and spontaneous way, after he had finished his speech and taken his seat, he whispered to his old ally: 'Make it up, Gorst?' From that moment friendly relations were re-established, and it was not long before the same cordiality existed between the four friends, now firmly welded together in a common interest, as had marked their

political association before the quarrel over the Coercion Bill at the beginning of the year.

On April 26th there was another scene when Bradlaugh, re-elected for Northampton, made his way to the table and endeavoured to take the oath. The initiative was taken by Sir Stafford Northcote, who raised the stereotyped objection in the form originally prescribed by Sir Henry Wolff. The Fourth Party, who, it should be remarked, consistently took up this position and made no personal attack on Bradlaugh, insisted in the debate which followed that the question ought to be treated purely as one of legality and reasonable respect for the forms of the House. It was not, however, until May 6th that the combined activity of the four allies was brought once more prominently into play. The motion for the House to go into Committee on the Parliamentary Oaths Bill, by which it was sought to remove Bradlaugh's legal disability in subscribing to usual custom, was under discussion, and the Government had proposed the adjournment of the debate until the following Tuesday at two o'clock. According to the Standing Orders and the ordinary rules by which public business was conducted, the proper time for the meeting of the

House on any day of the week except Wednesday, when the morning sitting took place which has since been altered to Friday, was four o'clock in the afternoon. The Fourth Party opposed the Government's proposal with great energy, urging that the House had never resolved that it would sit at an earlier hour on Tuesday, and that the motion was, therefore, out of order. It made capital out of the fact that the Government had already encroached before Easter, contrary to usual practice, upon the rights of private members, and brought about a heated discussion, which was only postponed by the hostile ruling of the Speaker. Its members, nothing daunted, returned to the charge later on. Mr. Labouchere intervened in his colleague's interest, and uttered some warning about the unhappy consequences that might ensue if facilities were not granted for getting on with the Parliamentary Oaths Bill. Thereupon the Fourth Party promptly accused him of threatening the House, if it did not assent to a morning sitting, with further discreditable scenes on the part of Bradlaugh. The Government divided, but only obtained the small majority of twenty-one. Lord Randolph and his friends seized upon this advan-

tage and heckled the Treasury Bench until Gladstone, under pressure of appeals as to the impropriety of overriding the wishes of large minorities, consented to give up the morning sitting.

Nor did the matter end here. The evening sitting on Tuesdays was then, as now, given up to the discussion of private members' motions. On the day when the Government had hoped to obtain the consent of the House to an early meeting at two o'clock an incident happened—not very remarkable in itself—that gave the energetic Fourth Party an opening of which it was not slow to avail itself. The House in the course of this Tuesday evening was counted out ; and it happened, as it very often does happen on private members' nights, that the Government was only represented on the Treasury Bench by one solitary Minister. On the following Thursday the Fourth Party went down to the House of Commons full of indignation, and demanded an explanation of the conduct of the Government. Lord Randolph Churchill moved the adjournment of the House for this purpose, and frankly accused Ministers of having acted out of spite. The Government, he declared, had been undoubtedly

much put out at not getting their morning sitting, and had determined to show private members that they were not gaining anything by this refusal. Sir Henry Wolff seconded the motion, and Mr. Gorst also made a speech in support of it. The occupants of the Treasury Bench did not view the scene with any displeasure, although they were themselves the objects of attack. The renewed activity of the Fourth Party was not altogether regarded by them in the light of unalloyed misfortune. In the first place, there is nothing more disconcerting to a Government than the absence of any effective opposition. Good legislation does not always result from tame acquiescence. It is in the fierce light of controversy that great reforms are moulded into practical shape, not by the joining of hands or by a voluntary surrender of the privileges and duties of criticism. Sir Stafford Northcote's tactics were not always as helpful to the party in power as they may have appeared. Backboneless opposition often means invertebrate Acts of Parliament.

On the other hand, the Fourth Party was welcome to Ministerialists as a possible rift within the lute. Anything calculated to divide political opponents into factions is an object of

solicitude to their rivals. The growing friction between the official leaders of the Opposition and the independent group of Conservatives below the gangway had not escaped the attention of the Liberals in the foregoing session. They naturally hoped to reap advantage from it some day. This hope had been rudely shattered at the beginning of 1881, when the breach between the four political soldiers of fortune was apparent to everybody in the House of Commons. It was now revived by tangible proofs that a thorough and genuine reconciliation had been effected.

The healing of the breach came at a very opportune moment. To make amends for the weakness displayed in the session of 1880, when the Government had submitted to the rejection of its Compensation for Disturbance Bill by the House of Lords, Gladstone followed up the Coercion Act by the introduction of an Irish Land Bill. The passing of this measure, if it made less commotion than its predecessor, was rendered difficult in the first instance by the obstruction of the Irish Nationalists, who were annoyed by their ideas having been plagiarised by the Government. In the second place, the Fourth Party had now resumed its

full legislative activity, and assisted in amending the Bill in Committee with all the more zeal on account of the period of comparative rest which it had undergone during the earlier part of the session. Lord Randolph Churchill emphasised the fact that a reconciliation between himself and his colleagues had taken place by referring pointedly, in the course of the debates, to the 'members with whom he had the honour of acting'; and they continued to act together with unflagging energy throughout the various stages of the Bill, until they had 'assisted' the Government to pass it.

It was during one of the Committees on the Land Bill that a well-known incident occurred in which the Fourth Party bore a considerable part. The story has been often told, but cannot be omitted from this chronicle of the proceedings of those who were largely responsible for its occurrence. After the question has been put from the Chair, nobody may rise in the House of Commons for the purpose of making a speech. A member may only draw the attention of the Chair to a point of order, and in doing so must address the Chairman from his seat and with his head covered. This necessity, although it frequently arises at the

present day, had up to that time arisen very seldom. Even Gladstone, with his great Parliamentary experience, overlooked the rule on the occasion referred to. The question had been put ; but the Prime Minister, oblivious of the offence against etiquette, rose bareheaded to address the Chair. He was greeted with loud cries of ' Order ! ' led by the Fourth Party. Entirely mystified, Gladstone persisted in his endeavour to speak ; but his words were drowned on each occasion by deafening shouts from the Opposition benches. At last a Liberal member explained to him the reason of the interruption. The Prime Minister had no hat, and he looked hastily round for one that he could borrow for the occasion. The only available hat in his immediate neighbourhood belonged to Sir Farrer Herschell. It was many sizes too small for him, but Gladstone, driven to extremities, perched it on the top of his head, and in that fashion, amid the laughter of the Committee, in which he joined very heartily himself, addressed his observations to the Chair from his seat on the Treasury Bench.

On the third reading of the Land Bill Lord Randolph Churchill intended, against the wishes

of the Conservative leaders, to move the following amendment: 'That the Land Bill as originally introduced and as amended in Committee is the result of a revolutionary agitation, encourages the repudiation of contracts and liabilities, offends against individual liberty, is calculated to diminish the security of property, will not contribute to the peace or prosperity of Ireland, and tends to endanger the union between that country and Great Britain.' He was prevented from carrying out his intention by the action of the Front Opposition Bench. Mr. W. H. Smith had previously moved an official amendment, and, in spite of his failure to obtain any measure of support for it, as the Fourth Party complained, had not withdrawn it. The effect of this was to block the way for Lord Randolph's motion. The latter was naturally irritated at being, as he considered, out-manceuvred. He told the House that he greatly regretted being unable to submit his amendment, the terms of which he read out. He believed, declared the member for Woodstock, turning towards his nominal leaders on the Front Bench, that the principle of that amendment was recognised by the oracle of the Tory party; but the political wisdom which

was popularly supposed to attach to the prefix 'right honourable' decided that the amendment was inopportune.

During the interval that elapsed before the Bill was sent down from the Upper House Lord Randolph Churchill went to Trouville to recuperate. 'I was so seedy on Saturday and yesterday,' he wrote to Sir Henry Wolff, 'that Jennie and I are determined to go off for ten days till the Land Bill comes. Gorst tells me that many of the party are greatly dissatisfied with the Goat's conduct on the third reading.'

CHAPTER XI

FATE DEALS A BLOW

EVENTS in Ireland reached a climax before the opening of Parliament in 1882. The Irish Nationalists had not ventured to permit their opposition to Gladstone's Land Bill to go beyond abstaining from voting on the second reading and proposing amendments in Committee. This was their public attitude. The provisions of the Act reflected the policy of the Land League, and had, in fact, been borrowed from it; therefore in common decency the Irish could not carry their hostility to the Government and all its measures beyond certain limits. It came to the ears of the Government, however, that Parnell had made up his mind to prevent the proper working of the Act, which, from the agitator's point of view, was fatally beneficial to the Irish tenant and would inevitably result in allaying discontent. The Cabinet resolved to act at once.

The Prime Minister prepared the country for what was to follow by exposing Parnell's tactics in a speech delivered at Leeds. A few days later the Irish leader, who had replied to Gladstone by threats, was arrested and lodged in Kilmainham gaol. This move on the part of the Executive produced the contrary effect to that which had been anticipated. Instead of the Land Act working satisfactorily and the agitation dying down, Parnell's authority passed, as he had threateningly predicted before his arrest, into the mysterious hands of 'Captain Moonlight.'

The situation, growing daily worse and worse, was equally intolerable to Parnell in his prison and to the Government. The fact became apparent to Ministers that they had placed under lock and key the only person who had control over the lawless elements in Irish society, and that the principal effect of his imprisonment was to set the latter loose. Parnell, on his side, saw his power and influence slipping away from him and the agitation, which it had always been his endeavour to keep within certain limits, getting out of bounds. His release appears on this account to have been as much desired by Gladstone

and the Cabinet as by himself. The first step towards negotiating the freedom of the Nationalist prisoners was taken, it is generally agreed, by Parnell. How the understanding known to history as the Kilmainham Treaty was arrived at is an interesting disclosure that has yet to be made. But there is no doubt that the Government consented to release Parnell and his fellow-prisoners, and that, if no actual bargain was made on either side, there was some kind of moral compact which partook of that nature. This momentous and startling event happened halfway through the session of 1882. When Parliament met in February only the first act of the drama had been played ; Parnell and his associates had been arrested under Mr. Forster's Coercion Act, and public indignation had been aroused on both sides of St. George's Channel through the arbitrary nature of the proceeding.

Lord Randolph Churchill spent Christmas in Ireland, and on December 26 he was joined in Dublin by Mr. Gorst, who stayed with him for a week. The exciting occurrences of the autumn and winter were naturally the principal topic of conversation at the Irish capital, and the two friends received some useful impressions

as to how things were regarded locally. Few people were found to sympathise with Mr. Forster's policy, and the youthful experiences of Lord Randolph and his English guest had given both, as has been seen, a decided aversion to oppressive measures in dealing with a weaker nation. They returned to England disgusted with the Coercion Act and the misery and injustice it had entailed. During January the Fourth Party dined together on two occasions, and discussed the gravity of the situation in Ireland, the failure of the Chief Secretary, to whom Gladstone had given way against his better convictions, and the probable intentions of the Government. For some inexplicable reason, however, the Parliamentary dinner instituted by the four allies in the previous year in imitation of the Ministerial and Opposition banquets, failed to take place. Lord Randolph Churchill and Sir Henry Wolff dined together alone, whilst Mr. Balfour took Mr. Gorst to dine with Lord Percy. There is no doubt that this defection on the part of the latter two members of the Fourth Party troubled the minds of their colleagues to some little extent. No coolness resulted from it, but an ungrounded suspicion took hold of Lord Randolph for the

time being, Lord Percy being closely attached to the official leaders of the Conservative party, whose cause he espoused at a later period with great energy. He sounded Mr. Gorst on the subject on one occasion, but reported to Sir Henry Wolff in a letter that he 'could get nothing out of him,' adding, moreover, that he was quite certain there had been nothing to conceal. The cloud was, happily, only a passing one. Lord Randolph soon convinced himself that no sinister influence was at work to sow dissension, and the Fourth Party opened its third session by combining in a spirited frontal attack on the Government, during the debate on the Address, for its action in suppressing the Land League. The line taken by the Fourth Party was that the Irish Executive had exceeded the limits of legality, and this contention, which was largely supported by popular opinion throughout the country, was a source of much embarrassment to the Liberal Ministry.

A week later there was a great scene in the House of Commons. Bradlaugh suddenly made his appearance, rushed up to the table, pulled a New Testament out of his pocket, and administered the oath to himself. The whole

drama was enacted with such swiftness that the paralysed House could only look on in mute astonishment. Members on both sides were so accustomed to see the Fourth Party rise to emergencies that no one was surprised, when the first shock of bewilderment was over, to observe Lord Randolph Churchill on his feet calmly addressing the Chair. By this fresh outrage he declared that Bradlaugh had vacated his seat. The book on which he had sworn might, for all they knew, be the 'Fruits of Philosophy.' He entreated the House to vindicate its authority, and moved for a new writ. The usual thing happened: Gladstone refused to take any immediate decision, but put off the evil hour until the morrow. Sir Stafford Northcote then proceeded to discount Lord Randolph's action by moving merely that Bradlaugh be excluded from the precincts of the House. This was more than the Fourth Party could bear. Lord Randolph angrily denounced his official leader's motion as 'milk-and-water' policy, an expression that was loudly cheered by his colleagues and re-echoed elsewhere on the Opposition benches; and the group of independents eventually succeeded in forcing Sir Stafford Northcote to change his mild

resolution into a motion for the expulsion of Bradlaugh from the House. Its persistence was justified : the motion was carried, and the seat for Northampton became vacant once more.

Shortly after this episode a great misfortune befell the Fourth Party. Lord Randolph Churchill was incapacitated by a long and serious illness, which necessitated his absence from the House of Commons for a period of nearly five months. The blow to the remaining colleagues was severe. Irish affairs, in which the member for Woodstock was the leading spirit on account of his knowledge and experience, absorbed the attention of Parliament during the greater part of this period in an ever-increasing degree. He was visited and consulted by his political friends when lying on his bed of sickness at Wimbledon ; but no amount of advice could compensate them for the loss of his brilliancy and resource in debate. Some of the greatest scenes in the Parliamentary history of Gladstone's Government at that epoch were enacted during his enforced retirement. The Kilmainham Treaty and the Phoenix Park murders occurred at a time when he was scarcely able to take active

interest in political affairs, and the great opportunities which these stirring events afforded to the opponents of the Ministry were not, it has been considered by many acute observers who were then members of the House of Commons, realised to the fullest advantage in Lord Randolph's absence. In spite of the disability under which it was laid, the Fourth Party held its ground and continued to play a vigorous part in the conduct of the Opposition. Its energy in this respect formed a marked contrast to the first two months of the 1881 session, when the three colleagues had similarly been left to their own devices. In 1882 there was no shadow of a disagreement to damp the enthusiasm or to check the spontaneity of the triumvirate below the gangway. Their activity was unabated ; they won many triumphs in the heated discussions that marked the proceedings of the House ; but the loss of Lord Randolph Churchill was irreparable on more than one momentous occasion, when the Government was pushed to extremes, and might, with the formidable interposition of the member for Woodstock, have been defeated altogether.

The crisis came when, at the beginning of May, it was suddenly announced to the world

that Parnell and his fellow-agitators had been released from prison. The rumour that this apparent act of clemency had been preceded by mysterious negotiations between the Irish leader and the Government worked up the political excitement, caused by this unexpected event, to the highest pitch. Mr. W. E. Forster added to it by resigning his post as Chief Secretary. It was at once suspected that some political bargain had been made by the Government with the Nationalist party, and Sir Henry Wolff, on behalf of the Fourth Party, initiated a searching inquiry into the circumstances of the case. This led to a remarkable scene being enacted. Challenged directly on the point, Gladstone replied, with official ambiguity, that the Government had received information which justified the release of the prisoners. Thereupon the released Irish members—with the exception of Parnell, who had not then arrived—rose up in their places, one after the other, and repudiated having authorised anyone to make any bargain on their behalf. Mr. Forster's explanation put a sinister complexion on the affair. The secret negotiations for the release of the Irish prisoners, which had been conducted on behalf of the Government by Mr. Chamberlain, had been

carried on behind the Chief Secretary's back, entirely without his knowledge. He knew nothing of the Kilmainham Treaty until its result was made public by the freedom of Parnell and his associates.

At that time there was in Dublin a mysterious individual, known only by the appellation 'Number One,' who was credited with being the ringleader of the Fenians. In the midst of the scene provoked by the disclosure of the Kilmainham Treaty the Fourth Party created a great uproar in the House of Commons by pointing out Mr. Chamberlain, whose share in the transaction had just been disclosed in a sensational manner, as the 'Number One' of the Ministry. Sir Stafford Northcote moved the adjournment of the House to call attention to the disclosures that had been made, and the three Conservative allies vigorously supported the attack on the Government. The effect of the discussion was very damaging to the reputation of the Liberal Ministry both in Parliament and in the country. It was acknowledged, even by some of Gladstone's supporters, that had Lord Randolph Churchill been present to make one of his brilliant onslaughts the advantage might

even have been carried as far as the defeat of the Government. His absence was a blow not only to his own friends, but to the Conservative party. The incident served, perhaps more forcibly than any actual success scored by him in the House of Commons, to bring home to the Opposition his intrinsic merit as a fighting unit. Everybody remembers the sequel to Mr. Forster's resignation : how Lord Frederick Cavendish, with whom the Fourth Party had had many a good-humoured brush in Committee of Supply, was appointed Chief Secretary in his place ; and how, on arriving at Dublin, he was murdered by Fenians in company with Mr. Thomas Burke, the Permanent Under-Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant. That was an outrage for which Parnell and his Nationalist colleagues could never be held, directly or indirectly, responsible. They denounced the crime at once in a manifesto signed by Parnell, Mr. Dillon, and Mr. Michael Davitt. But a share in the responsibility was by many people, including the members of the Fourth Party, attributed to the Executive for persisting in attempting to govern Ireland by arbitrary and unjustly severe measures.

The attack on the Government for its con-

duct of Irish affairs was the principal achievement of the crippled Fourth Party during the session. Its next important action was the entering of a strong protest against the policy, then much in vogue, of granting charters to private companies and investing them with sovereign rights in distant parts of the Empire.

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of Commons was reassembled to pass the new rules of procedure, by means of which the Government hoped to modify the facilities for obstructing business, of which such ample use had been made by the Irish, and which, it must be admitted in all sincerity, had not been altogether neglected by a certain independent section of the Conservative Opposition.

The constitutional method of winding-up a Parliamentary session is the passing of the Appropriation Bill, the final stage of making provision for the expenditure of the great administrative departments. In August this orthodox conclusion to the labours of the session was duly made, and on the last day before the recess Parliament was adjourned until the end of October, the Government having announced its intention of holding an autumn session to introduce the rules dealing with obstruction. The Fourth Party, now in full strength, lost no time in attacking the Government for its method of procedure. It was pointed out that Ministers had committed a grave irregularity in adjourning, instead of proroguing, Parliament after the passing of the Appropriation Act for the year. The adjournment of the House was moved in order that

precedents might be demanded for this unconstitutional course, and the motion was pushed to a division, in which the four allies received a large amount of support. But their real activity began when the new rules came under discussion. Sir Stafford Northcote and the rest of the Front Opposition Bench were in favour of maintaining a conciliatory attitude towards the proposals of the Government, whose gratitude might, they hoped, take the form of a concession here and there. This conception was not at all in accordance with the sentiments of Lord Randolph Churchill and his friends, whose opinion about the best means of securing political advantages was based upon an altogether different estimate of the way in which opposition should be conducted.

These conflicting views soon brought the Fourth Party into collision with the official leaders, and relations became nearly strained to breaking-point on more than one occasion. The four colleagues drew up an amendment with the object of preventing a restriction, under the new rules, of the debates on motions for adjournment to the actual question as to whether or not the House should adjourn, and

moved it notwithstanding the disapproval of the leaders. It was opposed, amongst others, by Mr. Gibson (afterwards Lord Ashbourne); and when, on the day following, the latter was called to order for breaking the rule he had helped the Government to pass, the Fourth Party was loud in its manifestations of delight. But the real business of opposition was commenced when the question of introducing the closure—or *clôture*, as its opponents ingeniously insisted upon calling it—came up for discussion in the House of Commons. At the very outset Lord Randolph and his friends were in absolute disagreement with the line of policy adopted by the Conservative leaders. The latter were in favour of half-measures. Instead of opposing the principle of the closure as a fundamental doctrine, they adopted a middle course by advocating that the consent of the House to the application of the closure should be obtained by a two-thirds instead of by a simple majority. The Fourth Party attacked this half-hearted compromise in the most energetic manner. Three of its members—the fourth disagreed—drew up a comprehensive indictment against the proposal of the Opposition, which was delivered by Lord Randolph

Churchill during the discussion that ensued when it was put forward by Mr. Gibson in the form of an amendment.

‘The clôture,’ he said, ‘has been called an innovation—a foreign practice—but it appears to me that a proportionate majority, or what is called a two-thirds clôture, is a much greater innovation than the clôture itself, and is absolutely foreign to all our principles, ideas, or customs. I know of nothing in the history of this country, or in its laws, or in its Constitution, which can be adduced as a precedent or as an analogy for the proposal in the amendment that the House should require two-thirds of its members to affirm any proposition. We do not require proportionate majorities for the election of our representatives, nor would any proposition to that effect have the slightest chance of being accepted by the country. . . . We know, moreover, that many of the greatest reforms in our laws have been carried by majorities which did not number double figures; and it is undoubtedly, in theory, in the power of Parliament by a majority of one to change the Constitution of this country from a monarchy into a republic—which, again, I should say, would be a much more important matter than

the closing of an occasional debate. I own I am a firm believer in the general infallibility of simple majorities ; they have practically governed the British Empire from time immemorial, and I must express my surprise that the Tory party, or the Constitutional party, which recoils with horror from the Radical innovation of the *clôture*, should propose with eagerness, with anxiety, almost with desperation, the much greater radical innovation of a two-thirds majority. . . .

‘ I imagine that many of those who support this amendment are animated by a secret conviction that the palmy days of Tory government are over, and that the Tory party have nothing to look forward to but a long period of endless Opposition, perhaps occasionally chequered by little glimpses of office with a minority. I believe that view to be not only incorrect, but absurdly incorrect. That it is held by many I have no doubt ; and those who hold it propose by this amendment to build, as it were, a little dyke, behind which they fancy that they will be able to shelter themselves for a long time to come. A more hopeless delusion never before led astray a political party. How many times does anyone in this House think that the

present Prime Minister would permit the Tory party to refuse him the necessary two-thirds majority for getting on with his business? I think he might allow it twice, perhaps three times; but, as sure as he sits there, after the third time he would come down to this House and declare that the state of public business was deplorable, that the session was one of discomfort and disaster, and that the two-thirds majority must be exchanged for a simple majority; and within a fortnight or three weeks from the date of that declaration this precious little dyke, which was to shelter the Tory party for a long time to come, this little exotic which was so carefully introduced, nurtured, and protected, so that the Tory party might repose under its shade, would be abolished, cut down, and swept away into the great dustbin of all modern constitutional checks.

‘The best protection, the best constitutional check against a Liberal Minister which the Tory party can look to is the House of Lords; yet how often does the House of Lords, with its centuries of prescription, with all its vast territorial influence, venture to stand in the way of a Liberal majority? And yet, with this historic caution, not to say timidity, on the

part of the House of Lords in your minds and before your eyes, does anyone really seriously imagine that this wretched device, this miserable safeguard of a two-thirds majority, could for one moment arrest the tide of popular reform—a safeguard compared with which 'Don Quixote's helmet was a miracle of protection, or Mrs. Partington's mop a monster of energy and strength?

'No,' he concluded, 'oppose the *clôture* if you will; defend it if you can; resort for that purpose, if you have the courage, to all those forms and privileges which a Parliamentary minority still possesses, in order if possible to compel the Prime Minister to abandon his project, or to appeal to the country to decide between you and him; but, whatever you do, for Heaven's sake do not be seduced by interested counsels into following foreign fancies, and do not be persuaded by any desire to think only of the moment, and to disembarass yourselves of all care for what is to come.'

Mr. Balfour, the member of the Fourth Party who had disagreed with the policy adopted by his colleagues on the question of the closure, afterwards spoke, on the renewal of the debate

next day, in favour of the principle contained in the official Opposition amendment. This circumstance was not lost sight of by the Front Bench. 'His argument,' observed Sir Stafford Northcote, alluding to Lord Randolph Churchill's speech at the previous sitting, 'seems to me to have been completely answered by the member for Hertford, who sits near him, and I do not think it necessary to dwell further upon it.' The dissatisfaction of the Fourth Party at the tactics of the Opposition found another vent. A letter was drawn up for publication in the Press, in which it was declared that, if the closure were rigidly opposed by the Conservatives, it would be possible to force the Liberal party to dissolve Parliament and appeal to the country on that issue. The question, it was pointed out, had not been placed before the constituencies at the election in 1880, and therefore the Cabinet would scarcely be able to resist a united demand that the judgment of the electorate should be obtained on a vital matter involving freedom of debate in the House of Commons.

This letter, signed by Lord Randolph Churchill, was published in the 'Times.' It contained a strong appeal to the Conservative

party to avail itself of the opportunity, and to follow up the recommendations of the Fourth Party. If this course were not adopted, it remarked in conclusion, the Liberals would successfully manipulate the electorate during the next three years, and the chance of the Tories would be gone. The advice was not taken ; though it had the undoubted effect of stiffening the Tory opposition to the closure. But the Conservative leaders made no response to the exhortation that the Government should be forced to dissolve, and the obnoxious rule—of which such extensive use was afterwards made by the party that opposed it—was carried by the Liberal majority.

CHAPTER XII

IN OPEN REVOLT

IN April, 1881, a great misfortune had overtaken the Tory party. The death of Lord Beaconsfield left it in a condition of hopeless confusion, split up at once into two rival sections. The situation will be more clearly appreciated by recalling the events which occurred after Disraeli had been first called upon to lead the party in 1868, when the retirement of Lord Derby through ill-health enabled him, as he himself expressed it, to 'climb to the top of the greasy pole.' The General Election which followed in the same year was fought on the new register created by the Reform Act of 1867, and resulted in an unexpected Conservative *débâcle*. The Tory party was completely, and to all appearance permanently, destroyed. In this firm conviction the Tory nobility, who monopolised most of the high offices of administration, threw up politics

altogether. Disraeli's aristocratic friends retired from public life under the impression that the party would never recover from the blow. Believing that they, and not the Whigs, had been successfully 'dished' by his Reform Act, the Cabinet of dukes and marquises melted away, and the leader was left alone, to get out of his difficulties as best he might without their aid.

Disraeli was not the man to take defeat 'lying down.' He set to work at once on the seemingly hopeless task of reconstruction. In general, the Conservative party was at that time managed by a firm of solicitors; but the nucleus of a model electoral machine had already suggested itself to his fertile brain in the working-men's political associations that had been instituted all over Lancashire. He foresaw, with great perspicuity, that future success lay in reorganisation, and determined to develop a new kind of electioneering machinery on somewhat similar lines to these Lancashire associations. As has already been narrated in a previous chapter, the idea was carried out with the help of a few individuals, who laboured in obscurity to achieve the great party triumph that took place a few years later. When the

new organisation gave the Conservatives, for the first time since the days of Peel, a substantial and independent majority in 1874, the runaway nobility rushed back into political life and secured the lion's share of the spoils. Things soon began to drift into their former state of lethargy. The men by whom the victory had been engineered were forgotten, and the party machinery, instead of keeping pace with the improvements initiated by the Liberals towards the same end, was allowed to degenerate into a mere agency for providing the aristocratic leaders with opportunities for making show speeches in the country.

The inevitable collapse came in 1880; but nobody seemed to profit by the lesson. Lord Beaconsfield's death a year later extinguished the last ray of hope left to those genuine workers for the Conservative cause who had procured the party its former lease of power. In 1881 the Tories were face to face with the same danger from which Disraeli had struggled to rescue them in former times. Tory democracy had practically disappeared from the political faith of his one-time disciples, and the party which he had laboured to make a national and popular party was once more threatened

with exploitation in the interests of an exclusive class. The Conservative party was left without a leader. There ensued a period of dual control, which was most detrimental to its interests. Sir Stafford Northcote continued as leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, and a large section of Conservatives was under the impression that he would eventually be chosen as Lord Beaconsfield's successor. A rival appeared on the scene, however, in the person of Lord Salisbury, whose fellow-peers in the Conservative party elected him to succeed to the leadership in the House of Lords. A great deal of intriguing was carried on by the partisans of either candidate in both Houses of Parliament, and an unsuccessful effort was made, at a council of the National Union, to adopt a proposal for the selection of Lord Salisbury as leader. Neither of the two claimants took any part in these plottings and conspiracies. Their behaviour during this trying period was above reproach, and both preserved the most absolute neutrality until the dispute amongst their respective champions was settled by the Royal prerogative.

Whilst the rival leaders remained on terms of personal cordiality, the dual leadership had

the most damaging effect upon the conduct of the Opposition. The want of unity of action between Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote was highly prejudicial to party interests, and on more than one occasion led to a political fiasco. The proceedings in connection with the Arrears Bill in 1882 brought matters to a crisis. A meeting of peers was held at Lord Salisbury's house in Arlington Street, at which it was proposed by the leader that the Bill should be rejected by the House of Lords on its second reading and the Government forced to dissolve. The suggestion was carried with enthusiasm. Sir Stafford Northcote and his advisers, however, came to a different conclusion. They shirked taking such an extreme course, and made the counter-proposition that the Bill, instead of being cast out altogether, should be vitally amended by the Lords. These amendments, it was, of course, arranged at the same time, were to be stubbornly supported by the Opposition in the House of Commons. The arrangement was duly adhered to by Lord Salisbury ; but Sir Stafford Northcote found himself confronted by a division of opinion. This might have been overcome by a display of firmness on the part

of the chief in the Commons ; but this quality was, unfortunately, conspicuous by its absence. There never was a crisis in which a resolute leader was more needed. The consequence of this vacillation, or lack of effort, on the part of Sir Stafford and his counsellors on the Front Bench was an ignominious collapse. The Conservatives in the House of Commons, terrified at the possibility of dissolution, failed to carry out their share of the bargain, and allowed the Lords' amendments to be defeated by an overwhelming majority. Even Lord Salisbury's supporters took panic and deserted him at the eleventh hour. The discomfiture of the Opposition was complete, and it only remained for Lord Salisbury to be made the scapegoat for the whole affair.

In all these intrigues the Fourth Party took no part. Its members had openly expressed their dissatisfaction with Sir Stafford Northcote's conduct of the Opposition at a private meeting of the Conservative party before the end of the session in 1880, and had had frequent occasion to emphasise this view in a more public manner during the proceedings of Parliament. But they held themselves aloof from the partisan manoeuvres that were set on

foot after the death of Lord Beaconsfield, and maintained an attitude of neutrality in regard to the question of the party leadership. Meanwhile, however, their relations with the Front Opposition Bench by no means improved. Collisions between this energetic group and the official leaders became more frequent and embittered. They were also not altogether unanimous, as has already been seen, on the subject of Sir Stafford Northcote's personal merits. Mr. Gorst held firmly to the conviction that their chief in the House of Commons was a man of the highest ability, whose principal weakness consisted in a constant reliance upon the advice of others. This misfortune, he always urged, could be counteracted by supplanting the influence of 'Marshall and Snelgrove' with that of the Fourth Party. Lord Randolph Churchill and Sir Henry Wolff, on the other hand, failed to share this belief in Sir Stafford's talents, which they consistently regarded as too mediocre for the demands made upon the great position he had been called upon to fill. With Mr. Balfour a different motive was in operation. He was bound by family ties to the interests of Lord Salisbury, and was naturally debarred from any desire to

consolidate the position of Sir Stafford Northcote at the expense of his distinguished relative, whose claim to the leadership of the party was regarded as nearly equal to that of his rival.

This was the situation when the House met in 1883. The Fourth Party again failed to hold its Parliamentary dinner on the night before the opening of the new session. In fact, the experiment was never repeated after the abortive effort of the preceding year. It also happened that Lord Randolph Churchill was away on the Riviera, where Mr. Gorst spent a day or two with him early in January. The result of this visit was communicated in a letter to Sir Henry Wolff. 'Gorst will tell you what we have been talking about,' wrote Lord Randolph. 'I am anxious that we should all three of us give Winn notice that we decline to receive any longer the "whips" of the Front Bench. I think this would produce a terrorising effect.' A fortnight later, however, the influence of the Mediterranean air made itself apparent. 'My disinclination to return to England for the meeting of Parliament grows stronger every day, and I seem to have lost my interest in things political. I am happy in Capua, and the thought of once more

engaging with Goats and Gibsons *et hoc genus omne* makes me sick.'

The Speech from the Throne heralded little that was of political interest, beyond the announcement—to which little credence was attached—that a satisfactory settlement of affairs had been arrived at in Egypt. Nevertheless, the Conservative independents displayed unabated energy in undertaking all the duties of opposition, and took a leading part in the debates to which the past blunders of the Government's Eastern policy gave rise. 'As a leader of free-lances,' writes Mr. Winston Churchill,¹ 'Lord Randolph was for ever seeking for a chance to drive a wedge into the Ministerial array. To split the Government majority by raising some issue on which conscientious Radicals would be forced to vote against their leaders, or, failing that, by some question on which the Minister concerned would be likely to utter illiberal sentiments, and bound to justify a policy or a system which the Liberal party detested, was his perpetual and almost instinctive endeavour. Such had been his method during the debates on Irish coercion; it was his plan upon "Parliamentary

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 230.

procedure " ; it would have been his course, had he not been dissuaded therefrom, in regard to the suppression of the Boer revolt ; it was afterwards to be his attitude in much greater degree upon the unending tangle of affairs in Egypt. If the tactics he pursued were adroit, the sentiments he expressed were congenial. Alike from conviction and partisanship he was drawn continually to the more Radical view of political disputes. No one understood better than he the difficulties with which Mr. Gladstone had to contend, or the stresses which paralysed the Cabinet and racked the Liberal party.'

These words admirably describe the policy and action of the Fourth Party, of which Lord Randolph Churchill was the most distinguished member. But Mr. Churchill appears to suggest that this attitude towards Liberal legislation was merely adopted as good strategy for a group of free-lances who were not particular what they did as long as it was the means of embarrassing the Government. This cannot be his intention ; nor is such a suggestion borne out in other parts of his book. It was, truly enough, the combination of four clever men that devised this ingenious expedient of driving a wedge into the Liberals ; but it was the policy

of Tory democracy—the common basis of their political activity—which suggested and exonerated these tactics. This method of procedure, arising in the first instance out of political conviction, had been invented by the Conservative allies, and pursued by them with great success during the three previous sessions. It was continued in 1883 with equal success; but it naturally involved a measure of independent action that was a source of constant irritation to the Front Opposition Bench. Before the session was a month old this friction came to a head and developed into open hostility, as may be gathered from the following interchange of letters :¹

*Sir Stafford Northcote to Lord Randolph
Churchill.*

Private.]

House of Commons : March 9, 1883.

Dear Lord Randolph,—I understand that a good many of our friends are annoyed at the appearance of a kind of *communiqué* in the morning papers yesterday, to the effect that if I were to move the adjournment of the House (as some persons supposed I intended to) the

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 235, *et seq.*

‘Fourth Party’ would not support the motion by rising in their places.

You will, I am sure, understand that any steps taken with the apparent purpose of marking out a separate party within the general body of the Conservatives must be prejudicial to the interests of the whole, and I therefore call your attention to the matter, in the hope of preventing similar embarrassments in the future.

I remain, yours very faithfully,
STAFFORD H. NORTHCOTE.

Lord Randolph Churchill to Sir Stafford Northcote.

2 Connaught Place, W.

Dear Sir Stafford Northcote,—In reply to your letter, I have to remark that members who sit below the gangway have always acted in the House of Commons with a very considerable degree of independence of the recognised and constituted chiefs of either party, nor can I (who owe nothing to anyone and depend on nobody) in any way or at any time depart from that well-established and highly respectable tradition.

I am not aware of any *communiqué* on the

matter about which you write, and I must decline to be responsible for the gossip of the Lobby which may find its way into the daily or weekly Press. I would suggest, however, that 'similar embarrassments' would be avoided for the future if the small party of Conservatives who sit below the gangway were to be occasionally informed beforehand of your intentions on any particular matter. They consider that they have, during the whole of this Parliament, worked harder in the House of Commons than any other members of the party, and they know that a very considerable body of public opinion in the country approves entirely of the course of action which they have adopted. There would be less danger of 'marking out a separate party within the general body of the Conservatives' if you would use your influence with some of your late colleagues so as to induce them to abstain from holding my friends and myself up to ridicule and dislike by their speeches in the country, or covertly, by inspiring that portion of the daily Press which is notoriously under the influence of the Front Opposition Bench, to attack and denounce us, whose only fault is that at all times and by all means we have never ceased from attacking,

denouncing and embarrassing the present Government. I spoke on this point to Mr. Rowland Winn very freely at the end of the autumn session, and I regret to find that my so doing seems rather to have increased than modified the mischief.

I have the honour to remain

Yours very faithfully,

RANDOLPH S. CHURCHILL.

*Sir Stafford Northcote to Lord Randolph
Churchill.*

Private.]

30 St. James's Place, S.W. :

March 10, 1883.

Dear Lord Randolph,—I am very sensible of the zeal and ability which you and your immediate friends show in your Parliamentary work. But to turn your work to the best account you really ought to consider the first principles of party action, and, unless you mean absolutely to dissever yourselves from the main body, you ought to act heartily with it, except upon occasions when you feel yourselves bound to differ from it ; and when those occasions arise, you ought frankly but amiably to tell the leaders what your difficulties and your intentions are. You may be well assured

that I am only too glad to confer with all members of the party on these terms, and with yourself as frankly as with anyone. What I must object to is the apparent maintenance of a distinct organisation within the party. It produces infinite soreness and difficulty.

I remain faithfully yours,

STAFFORD H. NORTHCOTE.

Lord Randolph Churchill to Sir Stafford Northcote.

2 Connaught Place, W. : March 11.

Dear Sir Stafford Northcote,—I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter. I do not see my way to complete acquiescence in the views which you have been kind enough to express to me. Since I have been in Parliament I have always acted on my own account, and I shall continue to do so, for I have not found the results of such a line of action at all unsatisfactory. It is not in the power of any Conservative, however hostile towards me he may feel, to throw the slightest doubt upon the orthodoxy of my political views; and with respect to what may conduce to the ultimate benefit of the Tory party, I conceive that the

widest latitude of opinion at the present moment is not only allowable but, indeed, imperative.

You have not thought it necessary to allude to the remarks I made in reply to your first letter concerning the censure, the intrigue, the dislike, open or imperfectly concealed, of several of those who appear to be deeply in your confidence, and who may possibly be comprised amongst those whom you designate as 'leaders.' These are matters on which I am perfectly informed and equally unconcerned, but at the same time their existence rather weakens the effect of the second letter which I have received from you. The parties I allude to have a past to get rid of—I have not; and the numerous letters which I have for some time received, and which I continue to receive, from all parts of the country, and from all sorts of individuals and bodies, enable me to be confident that my political actions and views are not so entirely personal as you would seem to imagine.

In conclusion, I would observe that I did not commence this correspondence, but that, as you have done me the honour to communicate to me your opinions on my attitude in Parlia-

ment, I am under the impression that it would not be respectful to you if I were not to avail myself of this opportunity to place clearly before you what that attitude will continue to be. It will be the same in the future as it has been in the past ; and as I have no particular personal object to gain, and therefore nothing to lose, I can await the result with very considerable equanimity.

I have the honour to remain

Yours very faithfully,

RANDOLPH S. CHURCHILL.

This correspondence did not improve the relations between the official leaders and the group below the gangway. Lord Randolph Churchill had, of course, spoken for his associates as well as for himself. Open war had practically been proclaimed against the 'Old Gang' by the Fourth Party. It was not long before the occasion arose for active hostilities.

CHAPTER XIII

A BID FOR LEADERSHIP

THE principal event in the spring of 1883 was the unveiling of the Beaconsfield Statue in Parliament Square. The occasion was looked forward to in political circles as one of more than ordinary interest. In the eyes of the general uninformed public a fitting memorial to one of the greatest statesmen of the nineteenth century was about to be presented to the nation. The friend of the people, whose political struggles had made him the comrade of every man of ability who had his own career to carve out for himself; the man who had made England's name great among the nations of the world by grappling with the Eastern Question; the statesman who had practically banished the creed of Little Englandism from British politics, was about to be honoured in commemoration of his great public services. But behind the scenes of political life Lord

Beaconsfield was quite a subsidiary character in the coming ceremony. The subject that agitated the mind of every politician was not the nature of the tribute to be paid to the Conservative statesman who had accomplished so much for his country, but whether Lord Salisbury or Sir Stafford Northcote would play first fiddle on the occasion.

A few weeks before the unveiling of the statue on April 19, the second anniversary of Lord Beaconsfield's death, the official programme of the ceremony was made public. It was announced that the principal part in the function had been allocated to Sir Stafford Northcote, whilst to Lord Salisbury was relegated the purely secondary rôle of proposing a vote of thanks to his colleague. The effect of this arrangement was obvious. It amounted to a general recognition of Sir Stafford Northcote on the part of the Conservative party as its leader. The members of the Fourth Party lost no time in consulting together as to their course of action. None of them was prepared to endorse a step which marked out the leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons for the Premiership. They resolved, therefore, to make a public protest against the official

programme, and to complain that it had been drawn up without the smallest semblance of consultation with those who had subscribed to the memorial. A letter written in this sense, to which the signature 'A Tory' was attached, was accordingly sent by the Fourth Party to the 'Times,' in which paper it was published on March 29. The affair was described in it as the continuance of a series of attempts on the part of Sir Stafford Northcote's partisans to achieve a permanent triumph over the majority of the party, who regarded Lord Salisbury as the natural leader. Rumours, it was further declared, had been industriously circulated to the effect that a decision had been taken in high quarters to summon Sir Stafford Northcote, instead of Lord Salisbury, whenever the country might again require the services of Conservative statesmen. Finally, the letter wound up by declaring that it had become imperative to point out the intrigues which, since the death of Lord Beaconsfield, had paralysed the energies of the Opposition and now seriously threatened the vitality of a great political party.

This anonymous communication, appearing, as it did, in a prominent position in the columns

of the 'Times,' provoked a considerable amount of comment. Its authorship was guessed without much difficulty. Within two days it was followed by a letter from Lord Randolph Churchill which has become historical, containing a forcible appeal to the Conservative party to put an end to the disastrous duality of control by choosing a leader without further delay. 'The position of the Conservative party,' he wrote, 'is hopeful and critical. Everything depends upon the Liberals keeping their leader, and upon the Conservatives finding one. An Opposition never wants a policy; but an Opposition, if it is to become a strong Government, must have a leader. The country, though it may be disposed to dispense with Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues, is not likely to exchange them for an arrangement which would practically place the Premiership in commission. The Conservative party must decide at once upon a name. This is more important with the modern electorate than a cry; but at the present moment, when the battle may be joined any day, we have fixed upon neither. Lord Salisbury, Lord Cairns, and Sir Stafford Northcote all possess great and peculiar qualifications. If the electors are in a negative

? frame of mind they may accept Sir Stafford Northcote ; if they are in a cautious frame of mind they may shelter themselves under Lord Cairns ; if they are in an English frame of mind they will rally round Lord Salisbury.'

Reviewing the conduct of the Opposition by Sir Stafford Northcote during the last three sessions, he said : ' Such a series of neglected opportunities, pusillanimity, combativeness at wrong moments, vacillation, dread of responsibility, repression and discouragement of hard-working followers, collusions with the Government, hankerings after coalitions, jealousies, commonplaces, want of perception on the part of the former lieutenants of Lord Beaconsfield, no one but he who has watched carefully and intelligently the course of affairs in Parliament can adequately realise or sufficiently express ; and if it be the case that Ministers have lost ground in the country, they have only themselves to blame, nor have they the slightest right to cherish feelings of resentment against the regular and responsible Opposition in the House of Commons.

' There are many, I know well, among the Conservative party out of the House of Commons who are convinced that if the present

opportunities for success are neglected or inadequately turned to account, the days of the Tory party, as we know it, are in all probability numbered; who are convinced, further, that if these opportunities are handled by third-rate statesmen, such as were just good enough to fill subordinate offices while Lord Beaconsfield was alive, they will be neglected or inadequately turned to account. Many of the party in the country are determined that their efforts and their industry shall not result merely in the short-lived triumph and speedy disgrace of *bourgeois* placemen, "honourable" Tadpoles, hungry Tapers, Irish lawyers. The Conservative party was formed for better ends than these. . . .

Lord Salisbury, alone among those who have endeavoured to guide the action of the Conservative party, has agitated Scotland and arrested the attention of the Midlands. His name and influence in Lancashire are more than sufficient to counterbalance any advantages which may have accrued to the Liberal party from the adhesion of Lord Derby. Even his opponents admit that he has projected a policy rightly conceiving and eloquently expressing the true principles of popular Toryism.

Against him are directed all the malignant efforts of envious mediocrity, and it is essential to the future well-being of the Tory party that these machinations should no longer be permitted to obscure the paramount claims of the one man who is capable, not only of overturning, but also of replacing Mr. Gladstone, and who—partly from a magnanimous trust in the good faith of others, partly from a very high, perhaps an exaggerated, idea of political loyalty—is in danger of being sacrificed to the internecine jealousies of some of the most useless of his former colleagues.'

Lord Randolph Churchill's motive in advocating the leadership of Lord Salisbury was questioned at once. It was clear that his selection to lead the Conservative party would have the effect of diminishing the authority of Sir Stafford Northcote in the House of Commons, and that the latter would inevitably refuse to retain his post in the circumstances. Underlying Lord Randolph's advocacy, therefore, an interested motive was thought to be discovered.

The letter was forthwith officially denounced by Mr. W. H. Smith; newspapers of all shades of opinion published condemnatory

articles ; a large section of the Conservative party got up a memorial to Sir Stafford Northcote, expressing its confidence in him as a leader ; and some indignant Tories even went so far as to institute a sort of moral boycott of the member for Woodstock. Meanwhile, faithful henchmen of the Opposition leader kept up an acrimonious correspondence in ' the 'Times,' denouncing Lord Randolph's letter in the severest language. The conduct of the Fourth Party in the House of Commons was also made the subject of violent attack. Its members were accused of having been guilty of flagrant acts of insubordination, and specific instances were alleged of the way in which Sir Stafford Northcote had been hampered in his conduct of the Opposition by the independent action of the four Parliamentary allies. To this accusation a reply was made by one of the Fourth Party, who was able to show that on each of the occasions designated it had acted with the concurrence and approval of the Opposition leader.

A week later Lord Randolph Churchill launched his second letter to the 'Times.' His ostensible purpose in writing it was to give, for the instruction of correspondents who dis-

puted the accuracy of some of his statements, a clear illustration of the want of unity of action between the two Conservative leaders by recalling the utter collapse, through this fatality of dual control, of the opposition to the Arrears Bill during the preceding session. He declared that he was not in the least alarmed by the violence of the replies to the former letter published under his signature. He knew well that many of those who were expressing with so much heat and indignation their disagreement with his views had themselves, on many occasions during the present Parliament, been loud in their condemnation of the apathy and irresolution of the Opposition and of the fatal influence exercised by one or two of those who surrounded the leader. It was because of his belief that the maintenance of the Constitution and the existence of a strong, resolute, intelligent and active Tory party were inseparably connected with each other that he had referred to the incidents of the past, with the object of averting grave disaster in the future. If that object were even approached by his letters to the 'Times,' he wound up, he was only too happy to bear the brunt of a little temporary effervescence, and to be 'the scape-

goat on which doomed mediocrities might lay the burden of their exposed incapacity.'

In spite of private attempts at dissuasion this letter was published on April 9, ten days before the unveiling ceremony. It created the most unbounded sensation in political circles by the inclusion of the following sentences, to which a pregnant significance was generally given: 'The differences of principle which sever the Conservatives from the Radicals are even greater and more vital to the future of the nation than those which agitated the times of Pitt and Fox, or the more recent days of the Duke of Wellington and Lord Grey. The questions of the continuation of the Monarchy, the existence of an hereditary Legislature, the preservation of a central Government for the three kingdoms, the connection between Church and State, are all more or less rapidly coming within the range of practical politics. . . . On all these, and suchlike questions, the Conservative party hold strong opinions, and if these opinions are to prevail it is essential that they should be represented by, and identified with, a statesman who fears not to meet and who knows how to sway immense masses of the working classes, and who, either by his genius

or his eloquence, or by all the varied influences of an ancient name, can move the hearts of households. Without such a leader the Conservative party is beaten even before the battle is begun.'

In his first letter Lord Randolph Churchill had borne tribute to Lord Salisbury's qualities as a leader. He had spoken of him as 'the one man who is capable, not only of overturning, but also of replacing Mr. Gladstone,' and had made a very obvious appeal to him to come forward and provide the Conservative party with the leader it lacked. The country, he wrote, was not likely to exchange Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues for an arrangement which would practically place the Premiership in commission. To this appeal Lord Salisbury had discreetly remained deaf. It was noticed that in his second letter Lord Randolph no longer alluded to anybody by name, but spoke in general terms of 'a statesman who fears not to meet and who knows how to sway immense masses of the working classes.' It was understood at once that the reference was mainly directed, not to Lord Salisbury, but to himself, who was equally the bearer of 'an ancient name,' and

whose rapidly increasing popularity amongst the masses of the people was already a matter of concern to the party leaders. At the Carlton Club and elsewhere this audacious manifesto was the absorbing topic of conversation. Elderly Tories affected to laugh at the presumption of a young and comparatively inexperienced member of the House of Commons, who had only sat in Parliament for a few years, yet who not only made no secret of his aspiration to lead the party, but actually had the impudence, as they phrased it, to come forward and offer himself publicly as the successor to Lord Beaconsfield. In the country, however, the audacity of the suggestion captivated the popular imagination. Already a dashing figure in the eye of the working classes, Lord Randolph was now on the way to become a hero. If the Conservative party at Westminster tried to smother his ambition with ridicule, the foundations were laid in more democratic places of a great, though short-lived, popular triumph, to be enjoyed, in the near future, at the expense of the 'Old Gang.'

The effect produced upon the Fourth Party by Lord Randolph's sudden bid for leadership—as it was almost universally regarded—will

be dealt with later. In the Conservative party at large no results were immediately visible. On April 19 the ceremony of unveiling the Beaconsfield Statue was conducted as originally planned. Sir Stafford Northcote pronounced the eulogy upon the deceased statesman, and Lord Salisbury proposed his vote of thanks for the speech. There was no demonstration of hostility by partisans on either side, and the dramatic incidents which had preceded the public function had no further development at the moment. An important political movement, however, owes its origin to the occasion. When, late in the afternoon of that day, Sir Henry Wolff went to the House of Commons, he found rows of members on the Opposition side wearing primroses in their buttonholes. The unusual sight made an impression on him. Lord Beaconsfield's principles were already beginning to be forgotten amidst party ambitions and jealousies, and a project commenced to shape itself in his mind by which the great Conservative's political ideals might be rescued from oblivion.

Walking away from the House, later on, with Lord Randolph Churchill, he communicated his idea to him. 'Why not found a

league with the primrose as its emblem?' Sir Henry Wolff suggested to his friend. Lord Randolph readily perceived the possibilities of the proposal. 'Let us go off and do it at once!' he exclaimed enthusiastically. They discussed the plan together, and eventually it was decided that Sir Henry Wolff should set to work without delay to get his scheme into shape. Nothing practical was done, however, until the autumn of that year, when Sir Henry Wolff and Lord Randolph Churchill invited Mr. Gorst and Sir Alfred Slade—a gentleman holding an important position in the Civil Service—to join them in founding the Primrose League. Being members of the Council of the National Union, they had all had considerable experience in the work of political organisation. The popular passion for badges and decorations was ministered to; a picturesque form of oath was drawn up, embracing devotion to the maintenance of religion, of the estates of the realm, and of the Imperial ascendancy of the British Empire; and a Ruling Council of the League inaugurated, with the four founders of the institution as its first members. These were added to as time went on; and a Ladies' Grand Council

was established, with the Duchess of Marlborough as its first president. Having been started under the auspices of the Fourth Party, the Conservative leaders viewed the new League with suspicion. They ridiculed the idea and refused to have anything to do with it. But those who were most contemptuous at its inception were afterwards glad to become the figure-heads of what proved to be a most effective as well as a novel party organisation.

Neither Lord Randolph Churchill nor his colleagues were inclined to pass over the events of April 19 in total silence. In the May number of the 'Fortnightly Review' there appeared an article, entitled 'Elijah's Mantle,' which bore the unmistakable imprint of the Fourth Party. It had, in fact, been written by Lord Randolph's hand after its contents had been discussed with two of his political partners; the third, for obvious reasons, standing aloof from active participation with his colleagues in all matters appertaining to the party leadership. The article provided the world of politics with another nine days' wonder, and served its purpose of proving to the sedate members

of the Conservative party that its author was not a man whose aspirations could be snuffed out by ordinary ridicule.

'The Liberals,' it stated, 'can afford better to sustain great disasters than the Conservatives, for there is a recuperative power innate in Liberal principles—the result of the longing of the human mind for progress and for adventure—which enables them to recover rapidly and unexpectedly from misfortunes which would seem to be fatal. The Tories, though possessing many other advantages, fail in this respect. As time goes on their successes will be fewer and separated from each other by intervals of growing length; unless, indeed, the policy and the principles of the Tory party should undergo a surprising development—unless the secret of Lord Beaconsfield's theory of government is appropriated, understood, believed in, sown broadcast amongst the people; unless the mantle of Elijah should fall upon someone who is capable enough and fortunate enough, carrying with him a united party, to bring to perfection those schemes of Imperial rule and of social reform which Lord Beaconsfield had only time to dream of, to hint at, and to sketch.'

Finally there was an illuminative passage

about the New Toryism. 'The expression "Tory democracy" has excited the wonder of some, the alarm of others, and great and bitter ridicule from the Radical party. But the "Tory democracy" may yet exist; the elements for its composition only require to be collected, and the labour may some day, possibly, be effected by the man, whoever he may be, upon whom the mantle of Elijah has descended.' This was even more explicit than the previous letters to the 'Times,' which had so greatly scandalised the Conservative party as represented by the Carlton Club. Lord Randolph was viewed with increasing suspicion as the writer or inspirer of this latest piece of political literature; but he continued, nevertheless, to hold his own and to compel the House of Commons and the party to take him seriously.

The four colleagues—or at least three of them—continued to act together with unabated vigour for the rest of the session, their concerted energies being chiefly directed towards the amending of the Corrupt Practices Bill. But a disturbing element had come into their personal relations. The principal aim of the Fourth Party, before the publication of Lord

Randolph Churchill's letters to the 'Times,' had been to supply an energetic Conservative Opposition in the House of Commons. This common purpose involved a revolt against the tactics pursued by Sir Stafford Northcote, which it considered to be absolutely fatal to the Conservative cause, both in and out of Parliament. It had no ulterior design. Now, however, a new objective had made itself apparent, although in a vague and intangible way. The compact that held the political allies together threatened to become wider in its application. Already the supposed designs of one of their number on the leadership were becoming a subject of public discussion in the newspapers and on political platforms. The suspicion was naturally engendered amongst them that it was no longer a question of an independent group working together for the common good, but that of the majority risking the sacrifice of their prospects in public life in order to secure paramount influence and power for one man.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

At the risk of jeopardising their political prospects Sir Henry Wolff and Mr. Gorst determined to stand by Lord Randolph Churchill. The latter freely acknowledged that he could not do anything without their assistance. Every move that he had hitherto made in the House of Commons since the commencement of his political activity had been previously discussed with his friends. Their experience of affairs was, naturally enough, greatly superior to his own. Whilst he was the most brilliant and dashing speaker of the Fourth Party, he went to the maturer minds of his two colleagues for information and advice. He was, as has been seen, by no means the man to act against his own judgment, or to submit himself in any degree to the guidance of others, unless expressly sought by him ; but he readily perceived the advantage of a combination of wisdom.

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Hence his important speeches in Parliament, his political contributions to the Press, and his letters on public questions during the period 1880-1885 were invariably talked over with Sir Henry Wolff and Mr. Gorst—and often, for the first three years of political partnership, with Mr. Balfour—whilst many of them were the product of their combined brains.

Lord Randolph Churchill's abilities were very great. He would undoubtedly have made his mark as a man of exceptional talent had he stood alone. But the strong position to which he had attained by the end of 1883 had been won, not by his own unaided efforts, but by the clever tactics of the Fourth Party. To deprive him, when it was most needed, of the assistance on which he had hitherto reckoned was not an idea that either Mr. Gorst or Sir Henry Wolff could tolerate. Both entertained the warmest feelings of friendship for their impulsive colleague, whose many lovable qualities endeared him to all whom he admitted to intimacy. Unreservedly, therefore, they threw in their lot with him; though one of them, at least, did not view the new departure in their aims with enthusiasm. Mr. Gorst, during the whole of his public career, had always protested against

place and power, rather than principle, being made the objective of political life. He had entered the Fourth Party not only because he perceived the tactical advantage of such a combine in the absence of an effective and united Opposition, but because he believed that his colleagues shared with him a keen determination to revive Disraeli's policy of social reform as the soundest basis of empire.

In Lord Randolph Churchill he had found a kindred spirit. They appeared to share the belief that a sound Conservatism was compatible with humanity and progress ; that the Tory party was in its essence intended to be a national party, to whom the masses of the people could look with confidence for the protection and furtherance of their interests. The aristocratic scramble for offices and emoluments, of which Mr. Gorst had witnessed so much during the fifteen years of his Parliamentary experience, was equally abhorrent to the generous-minded and unconventional member for Woodstock as to himself. This was the common ground on which they and the other members of the Fourth Party had met. They formed together, above all things, an independent group that protested against the degrada-

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tion of politics into a mere pursuit of individual self-interest. In following their own line of policy, after a fruitless endeavour to rally a feeble and spiritless Opposition, they had been unheeding of the consequence to themselves of thus running counter to the authority of the official leaders. It was this reckless and disinterested pursuit of a political ideal that had been the guiding inspiration of the Fourth Party in the past, and at the same time the apology for its conduct as an integral portion of the Conservative party. Mr. Gorst viewed with apprehension the departure from this principle, and did not conceal his regret that their future action was to be governed by a new and personal motive. He urged upon Lord Randolph that it should be his aim to succeed, rather than to supplant, Sir Stafford Northcote in the leadership ; that he might obtain all he wanted without intrigue and by legitimate means. The advice was disregarded. Lord Randolph was determined to take the course that produced so much party strife early in 1883, and which was now about to lead to a prolonged and fateful struggle with the Conservative chiefs. That he afterwards admitted that his object might have been equally attained

without all this friction, had he adopted his friend's suggestion, has already been stated.

The fourth colleague was placed in a situation of much greater delicacy and embarrassment than either of the others. Mr. Balfour, it was generally supposed, had joined the Fourth Party because it amused and interested him. He was less of a Tory democrat than the rest of his friends, but had sufficient sympathy with their political views to join readily in most of their proceedings in Parliament. The action taken on the Bradlaugh episode and the Employers' Liability Bill was quite congenial to him; and when the activity of the free-lance group developed into open hostility against Sir Stafford Northcote's method of conducting the Opposition, he was not averse to taking the most prominent part in voicing the dissatisfaction of the Fourth Party. This was perfectly natural and legitimate. The destruction of Sir Stafford's authority in the House of Commons not only seemed desirable in itself to the dissatisfied Conservatives, but was, in the case of Mr. Balfour, bound up with family interests. Loyalty to Lord Salisbury obviously compelled the member for Hertford to hesitate when Lord Randolph Churchill's

motive in attacking the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons appeared to be dictated by personal ambition. From the moment, therefore, when Lord Randolph's first letter about the unveiling of the Beaconsfield Statue was published, Mr. Balfour's political friendship began to cool. It is stated by Mr. Winston Churchill that Lord Randolph and Mr. Balfour remained privately on cordial terms, in spite of the collision of political interests.¹ That would only be in accordance with the best traditions of English public life. But it neither suited Mr. Balfour, nor could he have been expected, to act with Lord Randolph and the Fourth Party in the new circumstances that had arisen. Thus it happened that during the remainder of the session Mr. Balfour gradually dissociated himself from his colleagues; whilst, as will be seen hereafter, he opposed them actively when their proceedings threatened to endanger the security of Lord Salisbury's position.

In the autumn of 1883 the initial step was taken in a particularly daring campaign. Lord Randolph Churchill had attained to a triumphant position in the country. His audacity, and the

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 304.

unguarded fashion in which he spoke out his ideas just as they occurred to him, regardless of the consequences, captivated the imagination of the working classes. At political meetings his name was more loudly cheered than that of Lord Salisbury or Sir Stafford Northcote. He had, in fact, as the Tory papers themselves were compelled to acknowledge, achieved within the space of two or three years a popularity second only to that of Gladstone. In Lancashire his name was a household word ; and his influence in the country was so great that he determined to accept Birmingham's invitation to stand as Conservative candidate at the next election, and thus to beard the caucus in its own stronghold. The design cherished by Lord Randolph was nothing less than the wholesale capture of the party organisation. It was a bold scheme, that would probably never have entered any head but his. Circumstances were, however, by no means unfavourable to the attempt. A great deal of dissatisfaction existed already in the National Union of Conservative Associations. It possessed no real voice in the party management on account of its absolute financial dependence upon the Central Conservative Committee.

The latter had come into existence after the General Election of 1880, and was, therefore, quite a new body. It consisted of a number of members of the Carlton Club who had been appointed by Lord Beaconsfield to inquire into the organisation of the Conservative party. The Committee was never dissolved. It continued to exist, assumed the direction and management of all party affairs, and controlled the very considerable funds subscribed for party purposes. The National Union could do practically nothing of importance without the sanction of the Central Committee, because the money to carry out its schemes was only obtained by favour of the latter body.

The Fourth Party plot was an extremely ingenious one. It embraced the idea of re-
storing full power and financial independence to the National Union, and at the same time of capturing the control of the organisation. The first step was to persuade the delegates at the next annual Conference to register a protest against the existing futility and dependence of the National Union. After this had been accomplished it would be necessary to obtain a controlling voice on the Council. The demand to be made independent of the Central

Committee could then be formulated; and, if everything prospered, Lord Randolph and his political friends would be in a position to exercise paramount influence in the party organisation throughout the country. The plan seemed to promise success, partly on account of its audacity, but also for another reason. It was an open secret that a large section of opinion in the National Union looked with much favour upon the Fourth Party movement. There was distinctly a feeling that many of the older Tories were out of touch with the times, and that the younger and more energetic men should be given a chance of instilling new life into the party. For a considerable time, also, a great deal of irritation had been manifested at the position of impotence in which the National Union was placed. The annual Conference of Delegates was to take place in Birmingham on October 1 and 2, and it was decided that Lord Randolph Churchill should utilise the occasion to carry the first part of the scheme into effect. 'I have seen Gorst,' he wrote to Sir Henry Wolff on September 28, 1883, 'and arranged with him that at the meeting of the delegates at Birmingham I am to declare war against the Central Committee, and advocate the

placing of all power and finance in the hands of the Council of the National Union. This will be a bold step, the Austerlitz of the Fourth Party; but I fancy I may be able to put my views in a manner which will carry the delegates.'

The programme was carried out by Lord Randolph and Mr. Gorst—who were both, of course, members of the Council—with complete success. The former addressed the delegates in a most spirited speech, describing them as 'solemnly invited year by year to elect a Council which does not advise and an executive which does not administer.' He went on to say that he wished to see the control and guidance of the Tory party transferred from a self-elected body to an annually elected body, and the management of the financial resources of the party transferred from an irresponsible body to a responsible body. 'I say that this so-called Central Committee is an irresponsible and self-elected body,' he declared, 'and that the Council of the National Union is a responsible and an annually elected body, and I wish the control of the party organisation to be in the hands of the National Union and taken out of the hands of the Central Committee.'

There is no instance in history of power, placed in the hands of a self-constituted and irresponsible body, being used otherwise than unwisely at first and corruptly at last.' He held that it was of the last importance that all finance should be collected and administered by the Council. 'The corrupt practices at the last General Election on our own side, when the organisation was directed by a secret and irresponsible Committee, were so grave and flagrant,' he said, 'that our party in Parliament were absolutely prevented from exposing the graver and more flagrant corruption of the Liberal party.'

Lord Randolph denounced secret expenditure as invariably entailing corrupt expenditure, and then proceeded to address himself to a topic that particularly went home to his audience. 'The great bulk of the Tory party throughout the country,' he stated, 'is composed of artisans and labouring classes. They are directly represented here to-day; they are always directly represented on your Council; no party management can be effective and healthy unless the great labouring classes are directly represented on the executive of the party. . . . The Conservative party will never

exercise power until it has gained the confidence of the working classes ; and the working classes are quite determined to govern themselves, and will not be either driven or hoodwinked by any class or class interests. Our interests are perfectly safe if we trust them fully, frankly and freely ; but if we oppose them, and endeavour to drive them and hoodwink them, our interests, our Constitution, and all we love and revere will go down. If you want to gain the confidence of the working classes, let them have a share, and a large share—a real share, and not a sham share—in your party councils and in your party government.

‘ I would bespeak your earnest consideration,’ he concluded, ‘ of this grave question of party organisation. Whatever your judgment may be I shall humbly acquiesce in it. If you are satisfied with the present arrangements, if you think the National Union possesses the power to which it has a right ; if you think that things are going well with us and that the future is sure and promising—well, then, so do I. But if, on the other hand, you are of opinion, after careful consideration of events since 1880, that we have not yet learnt enough from the experience of the past to avoid

disaster in time to come ; if you think that we have not yet set our house in order, that we are not as well prepared for battle as we ought to be ; if you are dissatisfied and distrustful of our present arrangements and anxious about the prospects of our party ; if you are ready to consider and carry out needful and timely reforms—well, then, so am I.'

The delegates were easily persuaded by Lord Randolph's eloquence, and a resolution was passed directing the Council to take steps for securing to the National Union 'its legitimate influence in the party organisation.' The following letter was written to Sir Henry Wolff after the event by the chief actor :—

Lord Randolph Churchill to Sir Henry Wolff.

Birmingham : October 3, 1883.

Dear Wolff,—The proceedings yesterday were interesting, and on the whole satisfactory, but I could not give you an accurate account of them in a letter—it would be far too long. I shall be in town on Saturday, when you must dine with me. Tell Gorst I expect him too, and you will hear all about the infant

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caucus. The Goats yesterday had got wind of our proceedings, and came down in great numbers. Ashmead B. also went dead against us, and undoubtedly 'entravéd' our schemes to some extent. I made my remarks, which appeared to me not to displease the assembly, though they must have been poison to the Goats and Stanhope party. Raikes, who was present at the beginning, sniffing a row, prudently recollected he had an engagement and withdrew.

But he
a friend

Yours ever,

RANDOLPH S. C.

A more detailed account of the circumstances was written by Mr. Gorst on his return to town :—

Mr. Gorst to Sir Henry Wolff.

79 St. George's Square, S.W. :
October 3, 1883.

My dear Wolff,—We had a great triumph at Birmingham yesterday in carrying without division a resolution directing the new Council to take steps to secure for the National Union 'its legitimate influence in the party organisation.' They got Cranbrook, Norton, Grantham, and a whole bevy of Goats to attend ; but

Randolph, who was received by the delegates with a regular ovation, made a capital speech attacking the Central Committee, and carried all before him. The election, however, went off badly. Clarke, Chaplin, Claud Hamilton, and a lot of other undesirable men got elected, and it will require the greatest care and skill in the selection and election of the twelve co-opted members to secure us the necessary working majority. I don't quite understand ——'s game, but he evidently thinks it his interest now to do openly everything he can against us. Randolph will be in town on Saturday and Sunday, and we must have a cabinet council. Let me know where you are to be seen on Friday, and I will come to you at any time; my only engagement on that day is between 2.30 and 3.30 in the City.

Ever yours,
J. E. GORST.

Lord Randolph's speech at Birmingham was thoroughly satisfactory from the Fourth Party point of view. The attack on the Central Committee, however much it may have been in the genuine interest of the Conservative

party, was a far-seeing political manœuvre. It was, to use a candid phrase, a legitimate conspiracy. Those who took part in it knew well enough what they were about. But the leader of the conspirators—as Lord Randolph Churchill undoubtedly was from beginning to end of the entire campaign—offered a greater inducement to his allies than a mere struggle for the satisfaction of personal ambition. The capture of the National Union was intended to be a long step in the direction of Tory democracy. This Lord Randolph took care to foreshadow in his address to the delegates. It was a ‘capital speech,’ not only in the sense that it contained a convincing indictment against the exclusiveness and conservatism of the party organisation, but on account of its progressive and democratic tone. There had been a declaration of policy as well as a call to arms.

CHAPTER XV

FIGHTING THE LEADERS

IN the November following the Birmingham Conference Mr. Gorst left England for three months, having undertaken an important mission to India in connection with some legal business. This was a severe blow to Lord Randolph Churchill, who relied for the furtherance of his plans upon the great experience possessed by Mr. Gorst of the party organisation in all its details. He wrote to Sir Henry Wolff on the subject in terms almost of despair :—

Lord Randolph Churchill to Sir Henry Wolff.

Blenheim Palace : November 8, 1883.

My dear Wolff,—I have been terribly upset at receiving the enclosed from Gorst. I have written to him, telling him that I do not think his departure will of necessity be so advantageous to him, and that he may lose more

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than he gains. To the Fourth Party it is ruin. You must see him and talk most seriously to him. I have written to him, asking him to come and see me here before he finally decides upon going. . . .

Yours ever,

RANDOLPH S. C.

P.S.—Make Gorst show you what I have written him, and return me his letter enclosed.

The next day Lord Randolph wrote again to Sir Henry Wolff: 'I am still in a desperate state of mind about Gorst's going to India.' On November 11 he sent Sir Henry a third letter, which concluded with a further allusion to the loss of his colleague. 'I am going up to town, if all is well, early Saturday morning,' he wrote, 'and must have long confabulation with you and Gorst. I shall stay over Sunday, and have wired to James that I shall be delighted to dine with him. Gorst's departure distresses me greatly.'

The natural sequel to the events which took place at Birmingham in October was the election of Lord Randolph Churchill as chairman of the National Union Council. As may be supposed, this did not take place without

a considerable amount of opposition on the part of those representing the old order things. Everything depended, as had been foreseen, on the attitude of the co-opted members, about whose selection Mr. Gorst had displayed so much concern. Notwithstanding the machinations of the enemy, however, the adherents of Lord Randolph secured a small majority on the Council and eventually carried the day. The new chairman's first act was to communicate with the leaders of the Conservative party, in order to acquaint them with the changes that had been made. An amicable interview between Lord Salisbury and Lord Randolph took place early in January 1884; but the general attitude of the chairman of the National Union underwent no change towards Sir Stafford Northcote, as may be gathered from the following :—

Lord Randolph Churchill to Sir Henry Wolff

Blenheim Palace: Christmas Day, 1883

My dear Wolff,—I return you the Goat letter. I also send you one I have received from him, and one I have received from Lord S. I also enclose you copy of my answer to the Goat. Please forgive me if I venture

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to think that in your answer to the Goat about R—— you hardly showed your usual diplomatic reserve. It is not our policy to acquiesce in the Goat's movements unless they are in deference to our initiative. Please write me your opinions on the enclosures and let me have them back. Could you come down here any day this week or the next?

Yours ever,

RANDOLPH S. C.

Although the relations between the new chairman of the Council and Lord Salisbury were at first of a tolerably friendly character, the situation soon became strained through constant friction between the rival factions. Lord Salisbury gave great offence to Lord Randolph's partisans by persisting in communicating with the Council through the medium of Lord Percy, instead of through their chairman. Meanwhile no time was lost by the latter in demanding from the chiefs of the party the powers hinted at in the Birmingham resolution. In this he was at first completely successful. On February 29 Lord Salisbury replied to the demand by a letter in which he encouraged the Union in its aspirations and

pointed out the special directions in which activity should be employed.

Lord Salisbury to Lord Randolph Churchill

20 Arlington Street : February 29, 1884

My Lord,—I have the honour to acknowledge your letter of the 17th. The pressure public business must be my apology for not having sent you an earlier reply.

Sir Stafford Northcote and I have carefully considered the matters which you mentioned the small meeting which took place here January. Our task has been rendered more difficult by the circumstance that no proposals were put forward on the part of the National Union. Their communication was confined to the representation that, possessing an efficient organisation and consisting, as it undoubtedly does, of highly competent men, the Council had not the opportunity of concurring largely enough in the practical organisation of the party.

It appears to us that that organisation is local and must remain, in all its essential features local. But there is still much work which a central body like the Council of the National Union can perform with great advantage to the party. It is the representative of man

Associations, on whom, in their respective constituencies, the work of the party greatly depends. It can superintend and stimulate their exertions; furnish them with advice, and in some measure with funds; provide them with lecturers; aid them in the improvement and development of the local Press; and help them in perfecting the machinery by which the registration is conducted and the arrangements for providing volunteer agency at election times. It will have special opportunity of pressing upon the local Associations which it represents the paramount duty of selecting in time the candidates who are to come forward at the dissolution.

The field of work seems to us large—as large as the nature of the case permits—and ample enough to give scope for such co-operation as the able men who constitute the Council of the National Union may be in a position to offer. But if, on consideration, the Council should desire to submit to us any proposal with respect to the above matters, or to other subjects, it will, of course receive our attentive consideration.

Believe me yours very truly,

SALISBURY.¹

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 313.

Nothing could have suited Lord Randolph purpose better than this official reply. It gave precisely the opening for which he and his partisans were waiting. With great promptitude the Organisation Committee of the Council, presided over by Lord Randolph himself, proceeded to draw up an elaborate report embodying Lord Salisbury's suggestion in a way that had been very far from the latter's intention. 'The Council will no doubt perceive,' stated the report, 'that for the proper discharge of those duties now imposed upon them by the leaders of the party the provision of considerable sums becomes a matter of first class necessity.' This almost amounted to a joke, although it was naturally done with the utmost gravity. The 'now imposed upon them by the leaders of the party' was a delightful Randolphian phrase; but the document proceeded to business in unmistakable earnest.

'Your Committee,' the report continued, 'have reason to believe that there exists at the present moment a large fund, collected for the general purposes of the Conservative party, and collected principally owing to the exertions of the Marquess of Abergavenny, from which the Council has from time to time received irregu-

and uncertain contributions, more or less of an eleemosynary character. Your Committee would strongly recommend to the Council that this arrangement, which, in view of the new duties now devolving upon the Council, must be considered as of a most unsatisfactory nature, should be modified, and that your Committee should be authorised by the Council to claim from the aforesaid fund a certain definite allocation, which shall be set apart absolutely for the uses of the National Union, and shall in some measure enable them to commence the effective discharge of their labours. In view, however, of the large field of work marked out by Lord Salisbury's letter, your Committee are of opinion that whatever funds they may be able to obtain from the aforesaid source should be supplemented by a vigorous and earnest appeal to the Conservative party generally throughout the country for donations and annual subscriptions.'

That the suggestions contained in this ingenuous report, if carried into effect, would be provocative of trouble with the party leaders was sufficiently obvious. Lord Salisbury had proposed no definite scheme to the National Union, and had certainly not 'imposed' any

new duties upon its Council. Before definite action was taken by the latter body, however, Lord Salisbury was privately informed about the drawing up of the Organisation Committee's report and its character. Thereupon he wrote without delay to the chairman of the Council.

Lord Salisbury to Lord Randolph Churchill

Private and Confidential.]

March 6, 1888

My dear Lord Randolph,—I have been told on good authority that you had inferred, as a result of our recent communications, that in contemplation the National Union was in some manner to take the place of the Central Committee and to do the work which the latter exclusively does now.

As my letter does not mention the Central Committee, this misapprehension (if, indeed, it has arisen) must be due to something that passed in our conversation at the Carlton on Sunday. I should blame myself severely if it had misled you as to our views on this point. The Central Committee are appointed by us and represent us, and we could not in any degree separate our position from theirs.

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I hope, however, that there is no chance of the paths of the Central Committee and the National Union crossing, for there is plenty of good work for both to do.

I am sure you will forgive my giving you the trouble of reading this letter, which only issues from my desire that we should all work together in good understanding.

Believe me yours very truly,

SALISBURY.¹

History repeats itself; and in certain aspects this letter from Lord Salisbury must have strongly reminded Lord Randolph Churchill of his correspondence with Sir Stafford Northcote during the previous session. On this occasion he showed himself as little conciliatory as on the former. 'With reference to the hope which you express,' he wrote in reply, "'that there is no chance of the paths of the Central Committee and the National Union crossing,'" I fear it may be disappointed. In a struggle between a popular body and a close corporation the latter, I am happy to say, in these days goes to the wall; for the popular body have this great advantage—that,

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 316.

having nothing to conceal, they can at any moment they think proper appeal fully (and in some measure recklessly) to a favourable and sympathising public, and I am of opinion that in such a course as this the National Union will find that I may be of some little assistance to them.' ¹ The last words re-echoed the threat contained in the writer's previous letter to the Opposition leader in the House of Commons. They sounded a note of war, to which the Conservative leaders were not slow in responding. Lord Salisbury wrote an official letter in strong disapproval of the Organisation Committee's report. It was read to the Council by Lord Percy at the same time that the latter moved the rejection of the report, then under consideration. The motion was lost by a majority of five, and the adoption of the report was then carried by nineteen votes to seven.

This result was immediately followed by the most unexpected consequences. On the next day (March 18) a letter was received by Lord Randolph Churchill from Mr. Bartley, the agent of the party and a member of the Central Committee, giving the National Union notice to quit the premises hitherto shared by

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 317.

both sections of the party organisation, and informing him that Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote repudiated any further responsibility for the doings of the National Union. Upon receiving this open declaration of war Lord Randolph did not at once let loose the vials of the Council's wrath. The first step taken was to effect certain modifications in the report to which objection had been made, and to send the revised draft to the leaders. Lord Salisbury's answer to this communication put an end to any further effort at conciliation.

Lord Salisbury to Lord Randolph Churchill.

Private.]

Hatfield : April 1, 1884.

My Lord,—I had the honour of receiving a letter from you dated the 19th ult., in which, on behalf of the Organisation Committee of the National Union, you requested that Sir Stafford Northcote and myself would give our early consideration to a report and other documents which you enclosed.

We had already expressed our disapproval of the report ; therefore, in the absence of any explanation, we could not have entered further upon the consideration of it. We had the

advantage, however, of a conference with yourself and Mr. Gorst,¹ in which some passages of the report which seemed to us objectionable were explained. It was made clear to us that there was no intention on the part of the Council of the National Union either to trench on the province of the Central Committee or to take any course upon political questions that would not be acceptable to the leaders of the party. The 'large and general principles of party policy' reserved for the determination of the Council by the fourth recommendation of the report were explained to refer exclusively to questions affecting the organisation of the affiliated Associations.

It was very satisfactory to us to find from your language that the Council were at one with us in the conviction that harmonious co-operation between them and the Central Committee was of great importance to the interest of the party, and that the matters which have hitherto been disposed of by the leaders and

¹ The interview took place on March 21. Mr. Gorst had returned from India on March 2, and assisted to defeat Lord Percy's motion at the meeting of the National Union Council on March 14. In all these proceedings the Fourth Party—with the exception, of course, of Mr. Balfour—was conspicuous active.

Whips of the party must remain, as heretofore, in their hands, including the expenditure of the funds standing in the name of the Central Committee.

It was thought desirable that, in place of further discussing the report, Sir Stafford Northcote and I should indicate with more precision the objects to which the efforts of the Council may with the greatest advantage be directed. It appears to us that these objects may be defined to be the same as those for which the Associations themselves are working. The chief object for which the Associations exist is to keep alive and extend Conservative convictions, and so to increase the number of Conservative voters. This is done by acting on opinion through various channels by the establishment of clubs, by holding meetings, by securing the assistance of speakers and lecturers, and by the circulation of printed matter in defence of Conservative opinions, by collecting the facts required for the use of Conservative speakers and writers, and by the invigoration of the local Press.

In all these efforts it is the function of the Council of the National Union to aid, stimulate and guide the Associations it represents.

Much valuable work may also be done through the Associations by watching the registration and, at election time, by providing volunteer canvassers and volunteer conveyance. But in respect to these matters it is desirable that the National Union should act only in concert with the Central Committee, because there are in many constituencies other bodies of Conservatives, who do not belong to the Associations, but whose co-operation must be secured.

To ensure complete unity of action we think it desirable that the Whips of the party should sit, *ex officio*, on the Council, and should have a right to be present at the meetings of all Committees. Such an arrangement would be a security against any unintentional divergencies of policy, and would lend weight to the proceedings of the Union. Business relating to candidates should remain entirely with the Central Committee. On the assumption, which we are entitled now to make, that the action of the two bodies will be harmonious, a separation of establishments will not be necessary—unless business should largely increase. There is some advantage, undoubtedly, in their working under a common roof, for it is difficult to

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distinguish between their functions so accurately but that the need of mutual assistance and communication will constantly be felt.

I have the honour to be

Your obedient servant,

SALISBURY.¹

On receiving this letter Lord Randolph Churchill lost no time in taking action. A special meeting of the Organisation Committee of the Council was at once convened, which was attended—in addition to the chairman—by Colonel Burnaby, Mr. Gorst, and Mr. Cotter. In spite of this scanty attendance a resolution was passed authorising the following belligerent reply to be sent to Lord Salisbury :—

Lord Randolph Churchill to Lord Salisbury.

The National Union, St. Stephen's Chambers,
Westminster, S.W. : April 3, 1884.

My Lord,—I have laid your letter of the 1st inst., in which you indicate your reconsidered views and those of Sir Stafford Northcote concerning the position and functions of the National Union of Conservative Associations, before the Organisation Committee. It is quite

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 537-9.

clear to us that in the letters we have from time to time addressed to you, and in the conversations which we have had the honour of holding with you on this subject, we have hopelessly failed to convey to your mind anything like an appreciation either of the significance of the movement which the National Union commenced at Birmingham in October last, or of the unfortunate effect which a neglect or a repression of that movement by the leaders of the party would have upon the Conservative cause. The resolution of the Conference at Birmingham in October—a Conference attended by upwards of 450 delegates from all parts of the country—directed the Council of the National Union to take steps to secure for that body its legitimate share in the management of the party organisation. This was an expression of dissatisfaction with the condition of the organisation of the party, and of a determination on the part of the National Union that it should no longer continue to be a sham, useless, and hardly even an ornamental portion of that organisation.

The resolution signified that the old methods of party organisation—namely, the control of Parliamentary elections by the

leader, the Whip, the paid agent, drawing their resources from secret funds—which were suitable to the manipulation of the 10% householder, were utterly obsolete, and would not secure the confidence of the masses of the people who were enfranchised by Mr. Disraeli's Reform Bill, and that the time had arrived when the centre of organising energy should be an elected, representative, and responsible body. The delegates at the Conference were evidently of opinion that, if the principles of the Conservative party were to obtain popular support, the organisation of the party would have to become an imitation, thoroughly real and *bona fide* in its nature, of that popular form of representative organisation which had contributed so greatly to the triumph of the Liberal party in 1880, and which was best known to the public by the name of the Birmingham Caucus. The Caucus may be, perhaps, a name of evil sound and omen in the ears of the aristocratic or privileged classes, but it is undeniably the only form of political organisation which can collect, guide, and control for common objects large masses of electors; and there is nothing in this particular form of political combination which is in the least re-

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pugnant to the working classes in this country. The newly elected Council of the National Union proceeded to communicate these views to your Lordship and Sir Stafford Northcote, and invited the assistance of your experience and authority to enable them to satisfy the direction which had been imposed upon them by the delegates.

It appeared at first, from a letter which we had the honour of receiving from you on February 29, that your Lordship and Sir Stafford Northcote entered fully and sympathetically into the wishes of the Council, in which letter it was distinctly stated that it was the duty of the Council :

1. To superintend and stimulate the exertions of the local Associations.
2. To furnish them with advice, and in some measure with funds.
3. To provide lecturers on political topics for public meetings.
4. To aid them in the improvement and development of the local Press.
5. To help them in perfecting the machinery for registration and volunteer agency at election time.
6. To press upon the local Associations

the paramount duty of a timely selection of candidates for the House of Commons.

Nothing could have been clearer, more definite, or satisfactory than this scheme of labour; and, accompanied as it was by observations of a flattering character concerning the constitution of the National Union, the Council was greatly gratified and encouraged by its reception.

The Council, however, committed the serious error of imagining that your Lordship and Sir Stafford Northcote were in earnest in wishing them to become a real source of usefulness to the party, and proceeded to adopt a report, presented to them by us, in which practical effect was given to the advice with which the Council have been favoured, and they were under the impression that they would be placed in a position to carry out their labours successfully by being furnished with pecuniary resources from the considerable funds which your Lordship and Sir Stafford Northcote collect and administer for the general purposes of the party.

The Council have been rudely undeceived. The day after the adoption of the report, before even I had had time to communicate that re-

port officially to your Lordship, I received a letter from Mr. Bartley, the paid agent of the leaders, written under their direction, containing a formal notice to the National Union to quit the premises occupied by them in conjunction with the other organising officials, accompanied by a statement that the leaders declined for the future all and any responsibility for the proceedings of the National Union.

Further, in your letter of the 1st instant you express your disapproval of the action of the Council, and decline to consider the report, on the ground that the contemplated action of the Council will trench upon the functions of an amorphous and unknown body, styled the Central Committee, in whose hands all matters hitherto disposed of by the leaders and Whips of the party must remain, including the expenditure of the party funds.

In the same letter you state that you will indicate with more precision the objects at which the Council of the National Union should aim, the result being that the precise language of your former letter of February 29 is totally abandoned, and refuge taken in vague, foggy and utterly intangible suggestions.

Finally, in order that the Council of the

National Union may be completely and for ever reduced to its ancient condition of dependence upon and servility to certain irresponsible persons who find favour in your eyes, you demand that the Whips of the party—meaning, we suppose, Lord Skelmersdale, Lord Hawarden and Lord Hopetoun in the Lords, Mr. Rowland Winn and Mr. Thornhill in the Commons—should sit *ex officio* on the Council, with a right of being present at the meetings of all committees.

With respect to the last demand, we think it right to state, for the information of your Lordship, that under the rules and constitution of the National Union the Council have no power whatever to comply with this injunction. The Council are elected at the annual Conference, and have no power to add to their number. All that they can do is that, in the event of a vacancy occurring among the members, they have power by co-optation to fill up the vacancy.

I will admit that in conversation with your Lordship and Sir Stafford Northcote, with a view to establishing a satisfactory connection between the Council and the leaders of the party without sacrificing the independence of

the former, I unofficially suggested an arrangement—subsequently approved by this Committee—under which Mr. R. N. Fowler, one of the treasurers of the National Union, might have been willing to resign that post, and Mr. Winn might have been elected by the Council to fill it—an arrangement widely different from the extravagant and despotic demand laid down in your letter of the 1st instant.

You further inform us that in the event of the Council—a body representing, as it does, upwards of 500 affiliated Conservative Associations, and composed of men eminent in position and political experience, enjoying the confidence of the party in populous localities, and sacrificing continually much time, convenience, and money to the work of the National Union—acquiescing in the view of its functions laid down in your letter of April 1 it may be graciously permitted to remain the humble inmate of the premises which it at present occupies.

We shall lay your letter and copy of this reply before the Council at its meeting tomorrow, and shall move the Council that they adhere substantially to the report already adopted, in obedience to the direction of the Conference at Birmingham; that they take

steps to provide themselves with their own officers and clerks ; and that they continue to prosecute with vigour and independence the task which they have commenced—namely, the *bona-fide* popular organisation of the Conservative party.

It may be that the powerful and secret influences which have hitherto been unsuccessfully at work on the Council, with the knowledge and consent of your Lordship and Sir Stafford Northcote, may at last be effectual in reducing the National Union to its former make-believe and impotent condition. In that case we shall know what steps to take to clear ourselves of all responsibility for the failure of an attempt to avert the misfortunes and reverses which will, we are certain, under the present effete system of wire-pulling and secret organisation, overtake and attend the Conservative party at a General Election.

I have the honour to be

Yours obediently,

RANDOLPH S. CHURCHILL.

Lord Randolph Churchill had declared war on the leaders of the party. He now proceeded to put his threats into execution. When

the Council met on April 4 he reported the events which had occurred, from the receiving of Mr. Bartley's notice to quit down to the sending of the defiant letter to Lord Salisbury. This letter he read aloud to the Council, and then moved the appointment of an Executive Committee to carry out the recommendations of the report. A scene ensued. Lord Percy and Mr. Chaplin insisted that the letter should be withdrawn, and a motion was submitted by Lord Claud Hamilton 'that this Council regrets the disrespectful and improper tone of the letter of the Organisation Committee of the 3rd inst. to the Marquess of Salisbury, and declines to accept any responsibility for the same.' At the conclusion of a heated discussion the amendment was rejected by the majority of those present and the original resolution carried. The first pitched battle had, therefore, been won by Lord Randolph and his friends.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FINAL VICTORY

ALTHOUGH Lord Randolph Churchill's uncompromising letter to Lord Salisbury had provoked a complete rupture, efforts at conciliation were made by partisans on either side. The Council had been adjourned after the adoption of the Organisation Committee's report until May 2. During the interval a great deal of intriguing went on; but the attempts to destroy the ascendancy of the Fourth Party in the National Union failed, notwithstanding the fact that Lord Randolph only commanded a slender majority. The leaders of the Conservative party were naturally anxious to restore order within its ranks by force or by persuasion. When the former proved futile, they turned to compromise. The chairman of the National Union and his friends were perfectly willing to agree to anything that was consistent with their aim to

place the Union on a democratic and independent basis. A great deal of negotiation was, therefore, carried on between the parties, Sir Henry Wolff, who was on terms of personal friendship with Lord Salisbury's family, acting generally as the medium of communication.

There seemed to be a reasonable hope of a pacific conclusion to the dispute when an event occurred that showed how uncongenial the making of concessions really was to the leaders. Mr. Maclean, a member of the Council, who had all along supported Lord Randolph Churchill, suddenly made up his mind that the dispute had reached a stage when he could no longer throw in his lot with the party of Tory democracy. He had readily helped to do anything calculated to put an end to the dual leadership in the party ; but when it came to a question of Lord Salisbury *v.* Lord Randolph, his preference lay with the former. Unaware that a *modus vivendi* was in process of arrangement, he gave notice that he would move the following resolution at the next meeting of the Council: 'That, having regard to the paramount importance of complete harmony and united action between the Central Committee of the Conservative party and the

Council of the National Union, a committee of the Council be now appointed to confer with the Central Committee for the purpose of securing these objects.' Lord Randolph's majority on the Council was so small that this defection gave the official party some chance of scoring a victory. The leaders, informed of the circumstance, at once proceeded to make the most of the possibility. Mr. Maclean received official encouragement to persist with his motion.¹

All this happened at the eleventh hour. The meeting of the Council on May 2 was merely the ordinary one held every month. It chanced that several of Lord Randolph's friends and supporters were absent, nobody seeming to apprehend that a critical vote might be taken. The older Tories, who were in the plot, mustered in strong force, and carried the hostile motion by a majority of four. Lord Randolph, who had warned Mr. Maclean that he should regard his resolution, if adopted, as a vote of want of confidence in himself, immediately resigned. In the heat of the moment he even gave out that he intended to retire from politics. The rest of the Fourth

¹ See *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 325.

Party did not pay any serious regard to threat. When exasperated at the failure of some plan, or labouring under the irritation of being opposed in some matter by his political allies, Lord Randolph had often before given vent to similar declarations. On one occasion in fact, he declared that the Fourth Party dissolved and had ceased altogether to exist, but the next day he was acting with his friends as cordially as ever, just as though nothing had occurred to disturb their serenity.

Outside his own intimate circle, however, the affair made a profound sensation. The adherents of the 'Old Gang' could hardly credit their senses. The excess of their delight was almost indecent: they published the contents of Lord Randolph's letter declaring war on the leaders, together with a eulogy on their own action in upsetting the Fourth Party in the National Union. Elsewhere opinion was divided. 'Telegrams, letters, resolutions, deputations poured in upon him in a stream,' says Mr. Winston Churchill. 'Within forty-eight hours a formidable movement in his favour had begun.' Lord Randolph once remarked to a friend: 'The

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 327.

thing that can happen to a politician is to be abused by the Press. It does him some good to be praised. But when he's ignored altogether, it's the devil!' On this occasion he received the most weighty support from the 'Times,' which not only urged the leaders to make friendly overtures, but went so far as to suggest that if they delayed doing so they might find themselves in the position 'not so much of dictating terms of reconciliation as of accepting them.' Influential Conservative associations in Lancashire and other important centres took steps to persuade Lord Randolph to withdraw his resignation of the chairmanship of the Council, and sent deputations to the leaders to represent their views on the subject; whilst even the undergraduates of Cambridge University sent representatives to town with a message of sympathy and confidence.

In a few days Lord Randolph's spirits revived under these encouraging symptoms of popular feeling. Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote, who acted throughout with praiseworthy restraint, initiated official civilities; and Lord Randolph unexpectedly cut the knot, in his characteristic way, by attending a party

meeting at the Carlton Club and taking an active part in the proceedings with as much unconcern as if nothing had happened. A week later he was re-elected chairman at the meeting of the Council of the National Union *nemine contradicente*. The quarrel had gone too far, however, to be genuinely patched up. Neither he nor his friends had once wavered in their determination to carry through the Birmingham programme. The Council of the National Union was as sharply divided into two opposing factions as before ; but efforts on both sides were now concentrated upon preparation for the coming struggle at the end of July, when the annual Conference would take place and a new Council be elected by the delegates.

Meanwhile the activity of the Fourth Party in the House of Commons reflected what was going on outside the atmosphere of Parliament. During the early part of the session the Government was mainly occupied, as one catastrophe after another was reported from the Soudan, in resisting votes of censure on its Egyptian policy. In these debates the Fourth Party—now consisting of Lord Randolph Churchill, Sir Henry Wolff, and Mr. Gorst—played its usual rôle of supplying the vigour in attack

which the Opposition leaders lacked. Mr. Balfour, during the session of 1884, pursued a course of detaching himself by degrees from his former colleagues. He no longer attended their private deliberations or shared their counsels ; and although he continued to sit on the front bench below the gangway, appearing ostensibly to act with his neighbours as heretofore, he had in reality ceased to co-operate with them. Lord Randolph's proceedings in the spring of the previous year had practically severed the political partnership as far as Mr. Balfour was concerned. There was no open rupture with the Fourth Party ; but as the National Union quarrel developed Mr. Balfour became more and more isolated from it in the House of Commons, whilst he took an active part in the movement that had been set on foot for the destruction of Lord Randolph's threatened ascendancy in the party organisation.

The relations of the Fourth Party with the Opposition leaders became more strained in Parliament during the discussions on Gladstone's Reform Bill. Whilst the Conservative party as a whole viewed the extension of the franchise with traditional dislike, it dared not court unpopularity by offering anything like

resolute opposition to the measure. On the other hand, the advocates of Tory democracy were torn by conflicting emotions. With the principle of the Bill they were entirely in accord ; but Lord Randolph allowed himself to be carried away by his anxiety to put the Liberal Government out of office. Tory democracy was allowed by him to go to the wall in the initial stages of the Bill ; later on, however, he changed his mind and became once more the champion of Disraeli's political principles. He was the most uncompromising opponent of the official amendment, moved from the front Opposition bench by Colonel Stanley on May 23, proposing the postponement of the Bill. On this occasion he made a vigorous speech, in accordance with the Fourth Party principles of Tory democracy, which was destined to be repeated by one of his closest allies, at a later period, under circumstances then undreamt of. On one occasion there was a passage of arms between Lord Randolph and Mr. Balfour that gave a very plain indication of the extent to which the breach had become widened between them. In December of the foregoing year they had both addressed a Scotch audience on the subject of Parliamentary

reform from the same platform at Edinburgh. Lord Randolph had spoken in opposition to the projected measure of the Government, whilst Mr. Balfour had declared himself in favour of the extension of the franchise. When the former was accused, during one of the Committees on the Bill, of having abandoned his opposition to it, he declared himself to have been converted by Mr. Balfour's Edinburgh speech. The latter afterwards retorted by saying that 'his noble friend's efforts to be in perfect accord with the Conservative party, numerous and well-intentioned as they were, did not seem to be crowned with success.'

At this period the struggle between the rival factions in the National Union was assuming heroic proportions. Neither side left a stone unturned to ensure the discomfiture of its rival at the forthcoming Conference of delegates. This event was arranged to take place at Sheffield, where it was known that the local association was hostile to Lord Randolph Churchill. Whilst this was going on, the leaders themselves made some effort to arrive at an amicable understanding. The manner in which these overtures were regarded by the

Fourth Party may be gathered from the following letter :—

Mr. Gorst to Sir Henry Wolff.

Castle Combe : June 4, 1884.

My dear Wolff,—I believe Salisbury and the Old Gang are at last opening their eyes to the force of the Tory democracy. The effect will be that they will try to place themselves at its head and oust us from our legitimate position. Their efforts at conciliation are to be viewed with suspicion—‘The words of their mouth are softer than butter, having war in their hearts.’ Have you reflected on Howarth’s letters in the ‘Times’? He was A. J. B.’s host at Manchester and visits in Arlington Street. It looks like an attempt to pose as the champions of a more popular National Union, and to accuse us of being wirepullers and of manipulating the Conference and the Council. Seeing that Randolph is too strong and popular to be crushed, they will now make you and me the object of their attacks. Forwood has written to propose that I shall resign the V.C. of the National Union, so that Randolph may have as his associate a man ‘who may have travelled hitherto in a different groove.’ If this can be

accomplished he thinks R. will be a 'made man.' I will show you this letter and the answer I have sent when we meet. . . .

Yours ever,

J. E. GORST.

In the House of Commons two things happened at this time which have some bearing on later developments. On May 12 Sir Michael Hicks-Beach moved a vote of censure on the Government for its conduct of affairs in Egypt, and accused Ministers of having delayed taking steps to ensure General Gordon's personal safety. In the course of the debate next day Lord Randolph Churchill alluded to Sir Michael in the following terms: 'I hear a great deal about the deplorable weakness of the Opposition, but I did not detect any deplorable weakness in the speech of the right hon. gentleman who proposed this motion; nor did I detect any deplorable weakness in the sonorous and resonant cheers which greeted that speech continually from beginning to end—a speech with reference to which I may be permitted to remark that it was a magnificent indictment, all the more magnificent because it was so measured and so grave; and I think it

must have recalled to the Prime Minister himself the palmy days of Tory leadership.' This coupling of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach's name with the leadership was, as events afterwards turned out, highly significant ; though some of those who listened to Lord Randolph's words little suspected how prominent a part he was destined to play in giving effect to his opinion.

The second incident of importance was another effort on the part of Sir Stafford Northcote to conciliate the Fourth Party.

*Sir Stafford Northcote to Lord Randolph Churchill.*¹

Private.]

30 St. James's Place, S.W. : July 10, 1884.

Dear Lord Randolph,—Will you be able to give me a few minutes' conversation after Mr. Gladstone has made his statement to-night ?

We ought, I think, as soon as the intentions of the Government have been disclosed, to come to some arrangement for a meeting in London . . . in order to give the keynote for the party in the country. I would not make it a meeting about the Reform Bill exclusively, but have

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 354.

three or four resolutions—one, a general review of the Ministerial misdeeds; another, a growl about Egypt; another, on the question of the Franchise Bill; and a concluding one urging a dissolution, unless Gladstone has already announced one.

I should like to consult you about the resolutions and about some other points.

I remain yours very faithfully,
STAFFORD H. NORTHCOTE.

Lord Randolph's reply to this letter contained a direct allusion to what was going on behind the scenes.

*Lord Randolph Churchill to Sir Stafford Northcote.*¹

² Connaught Place, W.: July 10, 1884.

Dear Sir Stafford Northcote,—It is my duty always to hold myself at your service whenever it may be your pleasure to do me the honour of asking my opinion on any political question; at the same time, I feel bound to remark that former occasions on which, on your invitation, I have offered an opinion have almost invariably

¹ *Ibid.* p. 354.

led to considerable misunderstandings, for which, of course, I blame no one but myself.

The Conference of Associations, which is to meet on the 23rd, will have to decide upon important and serious differences which have arisen between myself and certain other parties who claim to be acting (with what amount of justice I cannot determine) as the representatives and agents of yourself and the Marquess of Salisbury; and till that Conference has taken place I am certain that it is not in my power to attend public meetings with the slightest usefulness or effect.

Believe me to be

Yours very faithfully,

RANDOLPH S. CHURCHILL.

There was no pretence, in fact, as to the contest between the Conservative leaders and Lord Randolph for supremacy in the National Union. They were fighting for the party machine: whichever side obtained the victory would be in a position to dictate terms to the other. It was a race to secure the controlling voice on the Council. Lord Percy, who, it will be recollected, stood godfather to the Fourth Party in the first division in which its

members took part in the new Parliament of 1880, was put forward as the official candidate for the chairmanship in opposition to Lord Randolph. The selection depended, of course, upon which of the two rival candidates succeeded in obtaining a majority of partisans on the new Council to be elected by the delegates of the Associations at the Sheffield Conference. The surviving members of the Fourth Party exerted themselves to the utmost to secure the final triumph. Nothing was neglected by them that would help towards this end. Lord Randolph rivalled Lord Percy in giving luncheons to delegates, and surpassed him in the magnificence of his hospitality. Everything depended upon the popular vote; and no opportunity was lost by the energetic allies of ingratiating Lord Randolph with those upon whom the election of the Council devolved. Mr. Balfour, on the other hand, canvassed actively in the interests of the official candidate, and did his utmost to prevent his former colleague from carrying the day against the Conservative leaders.

The contest was decided on July 23, the opening day of the Sheffield Conference. Arrangements were made for Lord Salisbury

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to address a meeting at Sheffield on the evening of that day. The delegates of the Associations and the Conservative members of Parliament attending the Conference were invited to the meeting; but the Fourth Party was officially ignored and received no formal invitation. The Conference itself was opened in Cutlers' Hall, with Lord Randolph in the chair, over 450 delegates being present. A report had been prepared by the Council detailing the history of the National Union quarrel; and the contents of this document, in spite of previous protest, were communicated to the delegates, and discussed by the chairman in the speech with which he inaugurated the proceedings. He was then attacked by Lord Percy for having 'broken away from the leaders,' and a general debate ensued, which naturally gave rise to some heat. At its conclusion the delegates proceeded to vote. The result was a great triumph for Lord Randolph and the Fourth Party. The former headed the poll with six of his nominees; whilst twenty-two out of the thirty candidates proposed by him were elected. Lord Percy was completely beaten. Only one-half of the official candidates were returned, and he him-

self only managed to secure the eighth place in the list.

Lord Randolph Churchill had succeeded, with the help of Mr. Gorst and Sir Henry Wolff, in capturing an important part of the party machine—the popularly elected National Union. They had achieved final victory in their struggle with the Conservative leaders for influence and power. Everything they desired was within their grasp. Tory democracy had triumphed; Lord Randolph would now be reinstated as chairman of the Council; the Fourth Party and the Young Tories were backed by the majority of the party throughout the country. The 'Old Gang' had received its death warrant; and the three remaining allies, having staked all, had won the last throw of the dice.

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CHAPTER XVII

SURRENDER

THE Fourth Party had gained the object which it had fought with the leaders. It in the first place, obtained the acceptance of Tory democracy as the guiding principle of Conservative associations ; secondly, it established Lord Randolph Churchill's power and influence in the party and in the country. The Tory Press itself hastened to recognise the new situation. Speaking of the proceedings at Southfield on July 23, the 'Times' remarked : 'The result showed that the substantial victory was won by Lord Randolph Churchill.' The Tories, the men who together had achieved this remarkable victory were now in a position to compel Conservative chiefs to recognise them as a factor in politics. They could neither be ignored nor made an object of personal attack but would have to be accorded a proper share in the councils of the party. Lord Randolph

Churchill was the most formidable of the three, on account of the extraordinary popularity to which he had attained throughout the country ; but the Fourth Party, notwithstanding the defection of Mr. Balfour, was, to those who watched its operations in the political arena, the real source of strength, both in Parliament and elsewhere, as a combination of energy, wisdom, and resource. ?

Confident in the future, Mr. Gorst, after the successful issue of the Sheffield Conference, went down to join his family at Freshwater Bay, in the Isle of Wight, for a few days' much-needed rest. His astonishment was great when, on July 26, a message reached him from Lord Randolph Churchill announcing the fact that he had capitulated to the leaders and had definitely arranged terms of reconciliation with Lord Salisbury. The circumstances which had brought about this unexpected event were simple in their explanation. After the Sheffield Conference Sir Henry Wolff talked over the situation with Lord Randolph. There was a general belief that the Liberals were on the eve of dissolving Parliament, and that the Conservative party would shortly be confronted with the necessity of forming a Government. Taking this possibility

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into consideration, it was clear to them that Lord Salisbury, if called upon to form an Administration, would be placed in a somewhat humiliating position should hostilities within the Conservative party be still kept up. On this account Sir Henry Wolff urged that a reconciliation between Lord Salisbury and Lord Randolph should be arranged forthwith. He also pointed out that, as far as the National Union was concerned, the Fourth Party had gained all it wanted, and that there was, therefore, nothing further to fight about.

Lord Randolph Churchill, convinced of the wisdom of this course, agreed to its adoption. Sir Henry Wolff at once assumed the rôle of intermediary between his colleague and Lord Salisbury. An interview was arranged to take place the same day, and two vital points were promptly settled by the principals. In the first place, Lord Randolph Churchill agreed to withdraw from his candidature for the chairmanship of the National Union Council, and arranged that Sir Michael Hicks-Beach should be elected in his place. Sir Michael was a warm friend of the member for Woodstock, and at the same time *persona grata* with the official leaders of the Conservative party. Secondly, Lord Ran-

dolph surrendered the independence of the Fourth Party in return for a promise that its members should receive the full confidence of Lord Salisbury and the other chiefs. There were also minor stipulations as to the official recognition of the Primrose League, and as to a public celebration of the conclusion of peace in the shape of a banquet to be given by Lord Salisbury to the new Council of the National Union. Tory democracy appears to have been thrown overboard. No promise regarding the adoption of its principles seems, at any rate, to have been obtained from Lord Salisbury at this memorable interview ; and from a remarkable incident that took place in the House of Commons during the autumn session of 1884, to which reference will be made presently, it may be taken for granted that if Lord Randolph made any effort to secure its inclusion as a principle of Conservative policy, the effort was entirely unsuccessful. (✱)

Some mystery attaches to the fact that the surrender was carried out without Mr. Gorst either being consulted or informed beforehand of the intention. He had, it is true, retired to the country for a few days ; but the telegraph was available, and it would hardly have been

a difficult matter, even had he omitted to acquaint his colleagues with his address, to get into communication with him after, at most, the delay of a few hours. The following correspondence is all that exists to throw light upon the point¹ :—

Sir Henry Wolff to Mr. Harold Gorst.

28 Cadogan Place, S.W. : Jan. 5, 1903.

My dear Harold Gorst,—Only on Saturday I saw the recent number of the ‘Nineteenth Century,’ in which was published your third article on the so-called ‘Fourth Party.’

It contains two passages which I should like to see corrected.

On page 138 you write : ‘Lord Randolph Churchill, on his own initiative and without consulting his colleagues, made terms for himself with Lord Salisbury.’

This statement does not accord with my recollections.

After the Sheffield Conference on July 23, 1884, it appeared to me and to some other friends of Lord Randolph Churchill that the election of a majority of his supporters on the Council of the National Union placed him in a position so strong as to enable him, without

¹ See also Appendix

any misconstruction or sacrifice of dignity, to negotiate with Lord Salisbury for more harmonious action. Your father was out of town, and there was no time to lose, as the election of a chairman of the Union was impending. I was therefore authorised to inquire whether Lord Salisbury would be willing to discuss certain points with Lord Randolph Churchill. The same day they met, and an agreement was come to on the following terms :—

1. Lord Randolph Churchill and his friends were to act in harmony with Lord Salisbury, and were to be treated with full confidence by him and the ruling members of the Conservative party.

2. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach was to be elected chairman of the National Union.

3. The Primrose League was to be officially recognised by the leaders of the party and by the Council of the Union.

4. In order to celebrate this concordat—as you have put it—Lord Salisbury was to give a dinner to the Council.

The conditions were carried out within a few days. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach was elected chairman and the Primrose League recognised, by resolution, at the first meeting.

As above mentioned, your father was at the time absent, but until now I had always understood that he concurred in the course taken. I had attributed his absence from the dinner to some other cause ; and I the more believed in his approval of the reconciliation from the support given the next year, after conference, both by himself and Lord Randolph Churchill, to a motion made by me in the House of Commons to adjourn the third reading of the new Reform Bill, during the interregnum between the resignation of Mr. Gladstone and the accession of Lord Salisbury. This motion is, I think, referred to by Sir Herbert Maxwell in his ' Life of Mr. W. H. Smith.'

I had regretted in later years to perceive that there was some tension between your father and Lord Randolph Churchill, but, through ignorance, I had imputed it to disagreements on the formation of Lord Salisbury's second Administration in 1886, when I was absent from England.

The second passage which, to my mind, requires explanation occurs on page 140. It runs thus :—

' But no member of the Fourth Party, except himself (Lord R. C.), was admitted to the

Cabinet. Mr. Balfour, though made President of the Local Government Board, was excluded from the latter distinction.'

I have always understood that at the time Lord Randolph Churchill not only advised, but urged, the admission of Mr. Balfour to the Cabinet ; and that this advice was not followed on account of Lord Salisbury's reluctance to give to a near kinsman an advancement to which others might think they had a greater claim.

Yours very truly,

H. DRUMMOND WOLFF.

A copy of this letter was sent to Lord Salisbury, who wrote the following comment on its contents :—

Lord Salisbury to Sir Henry Wolff.

Hatfield : January 7, 1903.

My dear Wolff,—Many thanks for your letter and its enclosure. My recollections of the distant epoch to which you refer are too faint to enable me to contribute anything of value to your reminiscences ; but I have a

general notion that they correspond accurately with the facts as I knew them.

Ever yours truly,

SALISBURY.

It may not be without interest to include two letters on the subject which subsequently passed between the late Lord Salisbury and Sir Henry Wolff. They serve to show that, although Lord Randolph Churchill's sudden resignation as Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House gave rise to considerable friction at a later date, Lord Salisbury was inspired by kindly feelings towards Lord Randolph Churchill in his last days.

Sir Henry Wolff to Lord Salisbury.

28 Cadogan Place : March 7, 1903.

My dear Lord Salisbury,—Your letter to me of the 7th January, concerning my correspondence with Harold Gorst, was not marked private ; may I assume, therefore, that you will not object to my giving a copy of it, for the sake of historical accuracy, to Winston Churchill ? Would you kindly inform me ?

Yours very sincerely,

H. DRUMMOND WOLFF.



Lord Salisbury to Sir Henry Wolff.

Hatfield : March 10, 1903.

My dear Wolff,—I have no objection whatever to your giving a copy of my note to Winston Churchill.

Ever yours truly,

SALISBURY.

It may be taken for granted that, mainly on account of the impending election of a chairman by the Council of the National Union, the surrender was arranged in a hurry. Whether this act of precipitation should be regarded as justifiable in the circumstances is a question that the individual may be left to decide for himself. But it had one inevitable consequence. The Fourth Party was virtually broken up and dissolved from the moment when the capitulation was carried out without the knowledge or consent of one of its three members. In the eyes of the uninformed public it may have continued to exist for some considerable time—until, in fact, the formation of Lord Salisbury's first Government in 1885. But the real end of the Fourth Party was the sequel to the great victory achieved by its members at Sheffield. It had been expressly arranged between Lord

Randolph Churchill and Mr. Gorst, when the National Union campaign involved Lord Randolph's friends in great personal risk in regard to the political future, that no step should be taken without Mr. Gorst's approval. The bargain had not been adhered to, and the relations between them consequently became strained as time went on and the consequences of the surrender to the leaders became apparent. It is true that Mr. Gorst wrote to Lord Randolph, approving of his withdrawal from his candidature for the chairmanship of the National Union Council, and describing the act as 'a good stroke of policy';¹ but, as Sir John Gorst remarks, in a general sense, in the Preface contributed to this volume, 'written as well as spoken words are sometimes used to conceal thoughts.' His disagreement with the step taken in his absence was emphasised clearly enough by his refusal to attend Lord Salisbury's dinner to the Council to celebrate the concordat.

It was not until the autumn session summoned to pass the Reform Bill that Mr. Gorst discovered what was really implied by the merging of the Fourth Party into the ranks of

¹ See Mr. Winston Churchill's account of the incident in *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 358.

the regular Conservative Opposition. On the second reading of the Bill an amendment was moved by Mr. Edward Stanhope for Lord Randolph Churchill, who was absent at Lord Londonderry's funeral, in much the same terms as that of Colonel Stanley, to which allusion was made in the preceding chapter.¹ Mr. Gorst's convictions had undergone no change since the critical events at the end of July. He remained, as heretofore, a Tory democrat. The opportunity to prove to the Conservative party and to his former colleagues that there had been no yielding of political principle on his part was not neglected. After the moving of the amendment he rose in his old place below the gangway, and attacked it in almost the identical terms employed by Lord Randolph himself in his Fourth Party denunciation of Colonel Stanley's motion.

When Lord Randolph heard of Mr. Gorst's action he resolved that it should not go unpunished. Accordingly, he went down to the House on the following day for the express purpose of administering a castigation to his friend. He repudiated any responsibility for the line taken by the latter, and declared that

the speech was a very painful surprise to him. He called Mr. Gorst's attitude one of ignominious surrender, and said that, 'if there was one thing that could destroy and shatter the hope of a peaceful settlement, it was that speech, because, if the Government thought it represented the views of any large portion of the Tory party, they would think they had nothing before them but a cowardly, vacillating, and disorganised party.' Speaking of his late colleague's remark that he (Mr. Gorst) stood aloof from the agitation in the autumn, Lord Randolph concluded: 'I have yet to learn that either the traditions of party warfare or party etiquette teach one to desert one's party, and stand aloof from and refrain from giving assistance to it at a moment of crisis and danger, simply because of the very inadequate and miserable reason that in one's own poor and very fallible judgment one does not altogether approve of the course which may have led them into that difficulty.'

Thus ended the Fourth Party. When the Liberal Government resigned office in 1885, and Lord Salisbury formed his first Administration, efforts were made by Lord Randolph Churchill, appointed Secretary for India, to abide by the

spirit of the compact which had bound himself and his colleagues in their struggle against the 'Old Gang.'

*Lord Randolph Churchill to Lord Salisbury.*¹

² Connaught Place : June 16, 1885.

Dear Lord Salisbury,—I do hope you will not be annoyed if I add to your many difficulties by these few lines. Of course, since I saw you this morning I have thought about little else than all that you were kind enough to say to me on many subjects. I do feel very uneasy indeed about Wolff and Gorst, and I cannot think that I have submitted to you their position as regards myself with the urgency which they are entitled to expect from me. If it were possible for you to consider whether it might not be in your power to recommend Wolff for the high dignity of a Privy Councillor I should be easy in my mind about him, and I venture to press this desire of mine upon you.

Gorst . . . knows his powers, his position in the House, his hitherto barely recognised claims, and it makes me perfectly wretched to feel that it must occur to his mind that his failure to obtain that for which so many persons

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 420.

the speech was a very painful surprise to him. He called Mr. Gorst's attitude one of ignominious surrender, and said that, 'if there was one thing that could destroy and shatter the hope of a peaceful settlement, it was that speech, because, if the Government thought it represented the views of any large portion of the Tory party, they would think they had nothing before them but a cowardly, vacillating, and disorganised party.' Speaking of his late colleague's remark that he (Mr. Gorst) stood aloof from the agitation in the autumn, Lord Randolph concluded: 'I have yet to learn that either the traditions of party warfare or party etiquette teach one to desert one's party, and stand aloof from and refrain from giving assistance to it at a moment of crisis and danger, simply because of the very inadequate and miserable reason that in one's own poor and very fallible judgment one does not altogether approve of the course which may have led them into that difficulty.'

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¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, i. 420.

of knowledge consider he is fitted in every way is due to lukewarmness on my part. If I did not know what the general feeling of the House of Commons will be as regards myself on this point, I would have hesitated to trouble you ; but I am certain that if, with respect to these two cases, things remain in the position you gave me to understand this morning they would be, I shall be considered to have failed my friends, and my powers, whatever they may be, of being useful to your Government will be impaired.

Yours most sincerely,

RANDOLPH S. CHURCHILL.

Lord Randolph's principal stipulation in accepting Cabinet office had been that Sir Stafford Northcote should be made a peer and the leadership in the House of Commons transferred to Sir Michael Hicks-Beach. To this Lord Salisbury consented ; but it is obvious that when the Secretary for India eventually pleaded the cause of his Fourth Party colleagues the Prime Minister was less complaisant. Mr. Gorst, at any rate, had incurred the resentment of the leaders to such an extent that the determination to exclude him from high office was

at once apparent. Lord Randolph's position was too strong to be assailed ; whilst, therefore, his claims were met and he was allowed to exercise great influence in the composition of the new Government, the full vengeance of the leaders fell eventually upon Mr. Gorst. It was only through Lord Randolph's powerful patronage that he received the Solicitor-Generalship ; and when that patronage was withdrawn at the formation of the second Salisbury Administration, in 1886, the offer of the same legal post was only renewed conditionally on Mr. Gorst retiring from politics when the first judgeship became vacant ; in preference to which he became an under-secretary, and practically remained in that subordinate position for the rest of his official career. Sir Henry Wolff was made a Privy Councillor, and resumed his brilliant diplomatic career, first going on an important mission to Egypt, and being finally appointed Ambassador at Madrid. Mr. Balfour, on his own merits, became President of the Local Government Board without a seat in the Cabinet ; though it is alleged that Lord Randolph, generously forgetting past differences, urged his admission to the latter dignity.¹

¹ See p. 309.

That Lord Randolph Churchill committed a grave error in surrendering his independence and breaking up the Fourth Party was proved by his subsequent career. It was the political combination that had brought him to the front with such rapidity. Had he stood alone from the first, he would not have reached the height of his ambition until he was strong enough to hold what he had grasped. What might have become of the Fourth Party had it consistently held together, one member refusing to accept any advantage which was not shared by the others, it would be difficult to conjecture. But the reflection cannot be excluded that a sinking of personal ambitions, and a resolute adherence to the principles of Tory democracy, might have made its career not only more brilliant individually, but a political example of unfaltering courage and conviction to which the historian of the future might justly have pointed with pride.

APPENDIX

Sir Henry Wolff to Mr. Harold Gorst.

28 Cadogan Place, S.W. : Dec. 29, 1905.

My dear Harold Gorst,—I have read, and send you as quickly as possible, the last proofs of your book on the Fourth Party. But there are some words with which I cannot agree. On page 303 you write : ‘ Mr. Gorst, after the successful issue of the Sheffield Conference, went down to join his family at Freshwater Bay, in the Isle of Wight.’ You then describe the action of Lord Randolph Churchill as a capitulation, and state that ‘ the surrender was carried out without Mr. Gorst being consulted or informed beforehand of the intention. He had, it is true, retired to the country, for a few days ; but the telegraph was available, and it would hardly have been a difficult matter . . . to get into communication with him. . . . ’

Some words, not important, are omitted in this extract. But the state of affairs was this. One morning, after much reflection, I came to the decided conclusion that as the events were hurrying on, and as Lord Randolph Churchill and his friends had obtained considerable advantage at the Sheffield meeting, we should do well to endeavour to heal

party differences when in an exceptionally good position. I therefore went to see Lord Randolph Churchill at Lord Wimborne's, where I found him, with some members of his family. The question was discussed freely, and I at length obtained Lord Randolph's reluctant consent to my attempting a reconciliation. I went straight to Lord Salisbury's, next door, but found him with difficulty, as he was going to a meeting of the Commission—I think—on artisans' dwellings. He then suggested that he should have a conversation with Lord Randolph Churchill at a garden-party given the same day at Marlborough House.

Here ended my part in the matter. Lord Salisbury met Lord Randolph as arranged, and the whole matter was settled far more quickly than I anticipated ; but this I did not then regret more than I do now. The concessions were mutual. There was no time for discussions or telegrams. The proof that our views were to be considered was evident from the appointment of Lord Randolph Churchill to the Cabinet, and from your father's nomination as Solicitor-General, a post which we thought he desired. I do not think the reconciliation can be considered either as a surrender or a capitulation, and I should be glad if you modified those phrases.

Yours very truly,

H. DRUMMOND WOLFF.

Mr. Harold Gorst to Sir Henry Wolff.

47 Albert Bridge Road, S.W.: Dec. 29, 1905.

My dear Sir Henry,—Very many thanks for returning the proofs of the last two chapters. It has, however, distressed me very much that the account of the Fourth Party's end has not altogether pleased you. I listened very carefully to all that you and my father had to say about the circumstances connected with what I have called the 'surrender,' and your objection to certain words I have used appears to apply, not to the facts as narrated by me, but to the inferences I have drawn from them.

I have endeavoured to state one thing clearly in my last pages. There was a definite compact between Lord Randolph Churchill and my father that the former, in return for his colleague risking everything for his (Lord Randolph's) advancement, would consider himself pledged to take no important political step involving their interests without that colleague being consulted. This was, no doubt, a private arrangement between them. I have fully understood that you advised Lord Randolph to make terms with Lord Salisbury. My point, as a faithful historian, is that Lord Randolph, having pledged himself as described, should not have acted on the advice of one partner without first consulting the other. Even if this had involved letting the most favourable opportunity go by, it was surely his obligation under the circumstances.

Such being the case, I hardly see how I could have modified my account without suppressing

essential facts, or how I could have described the merging of the Fourth Party into the ranks of the Conservative party other than as a 'surrender,' whatever compensating advantages may have been obtained from the leaders. It is, of course, only my fallible judgment ; but I thought over the conclusion more carefully than any other part of the book, with, I can assure you, the most anxious desire to do justice to all parties.

Believe me, yours very sincerely,
HAROLD E. GORST.

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